

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Edward Kerr -- September 24, 1996

Q: Good afternoon. This is Glen Marie Bricks. I'm at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward L. Kerr, and today is September 24 and it is now --

Kerr: 2:51 p.m.

Q: Mr. and Mrs. Kerr, I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity of coming by and talking with you about this. And it's my pleasure because we've been friends for so long. So we will begin now with our formal interview. And first of all I need to know your name --

Kerr: Edward.

Q: Speak loudly and give me your whole name please.

Kerr: Edward Kerr -- K E R R.

Q: And you are?

Mrs. Kerr: Kathleen Kerr.

Q: Okay. And, Mr. Kerr, your place of birth?

Mr. Kerr: Georgia.

Mrs. Kerr: Georgia.

Q: And what kind of work have you done during your adult life? Did you have a primary

occupation, that is, an occupation that really satisfied you or you were gratified in doing? What job have you had that really meant the most to you as a person and financially?

Mr. Kerr: That's be kind of difficult to answer for one reason and no other. Because first of all, I don't like working. Every job I had if I didn't like the job, I didn't do it. So I enjoyed what I was doing. Many jobs I would have, and at the time they were gratifying because they were a necessary thing. Now, when you ask me in my adult life, from my anti-work career or what?

Q: Your entire work career, what occupation or what job did you have that really meant the most to you and that you felt like accomplished the most?

Mr. Kerr: Well, to answer that question the way you're asking it, it wouldn't make sense. Because to answer it, let me answer it my way. How's that?

Q: Okay.

Mr. Kerr: Okay. First of all, when I came out of service, at this point I really started my adult work experience. There were no jobs. It was during the Depression, Second World War. So all the jobs went down the tubes because the war effort was over. So I wind up driving a cab because it's the only thing I could get. And I drove that for eight years, five years straight and about three years part time. And it was satisfying because, hey, I mean you have to have some way to make a living.

Q: Right. Right.

Mr. Kerr: Okay. Now, I didn't particularly care for the job, but it was the only thing I could get. The next job I got, well, starting my own business. And that was a necessary thing because I had gone to, under the GI Bill, I had taken a course in carpentry, I had been doing carpentry work before. And the unions were lily white. I couldn't get a job. Okay? This is why it's difficult for

me to answer the question the way you're asking it because of conditions. You follow me>

Q: Yeah, I follow you. And that's exactly the kind of answer that I anticipated that you would give and hoped that you would give. The only following question I would have to that was what years were those when you came out of the service and when you started to drive a taxi and on into the carpentry work?

Kerr: Okay. Well, I got home on my mother's birthday, the third of tenth 1946.

Q: A long time ago, huh?

Kerr: That's right. I started driving a cab thirty days later. A friend of mine, a female friend of mine, schoolmate, ex-schoolmate, she was driving, and I was trying to make an appointment to some factories. She told me don't bother because I could make more money driving a cab, and she sponsored me for my first driving license for a cab. Okay? So that's, and then I drove a cab, started in 46 until 1950 steady. Okay. And then the next few years I drove part-time because I started my own business in 1950.

Q: And that was carpentry?

Kerr: Yes.

Q: Yeah. Okay.

Kerr: Carpentry, and siding, home improvements.

Q: Now can I ask you a very specific question because having known over the, as many years as I have known you, I know that you were at one time the police director in the City of Newark. How did that come about and how long did that job last?

Kerr: The director's job?

Q: Yeah.

Kerr: It lasted a little over a year. But my police career spanned thirty-one years.

Q: I see. I see. Now during the time that you were working on the police force, and particularly as police director, how did you feel about that job? Did you feel like that was, was it a gratifying experience for you or was it nerve wracking or? Just how did you feel about the work that you did as police director?

Kerr: As police director? I saw it as an opportunity. The reason why I accepted it, I saw it as an opportunity to do some things in the police department that a black man would not be able to accomplish unless he was the director. Okay? And that's why. Cause I didn't want the job, but I took it because of that reason.

Q: So you were the first police director in the City of Newark.

Kerr: That's right.

Q: And you were appointed by?

Kerr: Mayor Gibson.

Q: Then the mayor, Kenneth Gibson. Okay. How far did you go in school?

Kerr: Altogether?

Q: Yes.

Kerr: I have a bachelor's in political science from Rutgers University.

Q: Okay. Okay, Mrs. Kerr, how far did you go, where did you go to school?

Mrs. Kerr: Hardwell, Georgia.

Q: Hardwell, Georgia.

Mrs. Kerr: Hardwell, Georgia.

Q: How far did you go in school?

Mrs. Kerr: We graduated there from high school.

Q: All right, I'm going to ask you the same question I asked Mr. Kerr about your work experience. What kind of work have you done?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I've worked. I think my job I worked in the service unit down south. And when I came here, I worked at my first job, I believe, was in the canning factory on Mulberry Street. Unique, I think it was Unique Canning Factory. And I worked there until I, after marriage, I had, you know, my daughter. Then I stopped working. I got pregnant.

Q: Let me ask you, you said you worked in the service down south. What kind of service? What does that mean?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, you worked for the white people.

Q: I see. I see. The domestic service.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. Domestic service. I think I got about twenty-five cents an hour. And after working there for a while, I came to New Jersey.

Q: Okay, now.

Mrs. Kerr: First I went to Ohio.

Q: Went to Ohio?

Mrs. Kerr: [voice too low to hear]

Q: If you could speak a little louder so I make sure that we pick up your voice on here. When did you guys meet and where?

Kerr: Right here in Newark. 1948.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Q: 1948. And when did you get married? How long had you known each other before you were married?

Kerr: Little over a year. Got married in 1950.

Q: How many children did you have?

Kerr: Four.

Q: And what were their names, how old are they now.

Kerr: Joyce is 46, she'll be 46 in December right? Well I know how old she is, but I know. Chris must be about 42 now right? Forty-something like that. He's two years younger than Joyce. So he'd have been forty-four now. But he passed as you know.

Q: Yeah. I know.

Kerr: And, let's see, Bobbie, let's see Bobbie's born in 48 so he's about, what's he. 58 I meant to say. So how old does that make him now?

Q: Thirty-eight. He's the same age as my daughter Nadine.

Kerr: Okay. Tony's thirty-four.

Q: So now the names of the children were?

Kerr: Joyce.

Q: Joyce.

Kerr: Chris.

Q: Chris.

Kerr: Bobbie.

Q: Bobbie.

Kerr: And Tony.

Q: And Tony. Okay. So you have four children. What was your father's name and where was he born?

Kerr: My father's name was Lester and he was born in Georgia. I think he was born in Georgia. Now he could have born in Carolina. I'm not sure.

Q: Catherine, what about yourself? Who was your father and where was he born?

Mrs. Kerr: George Curry. And my mother's name was Rosa Lee Curry. And they come from Georgia.

Q: Both of them were born in Georgia? I see. Your mother's name again, was what?

Mrs. Kerr: Rosa Lee Curry.

Kerr: Like Rosa Lee Parks.

Q: Okay. Her maiden name was Parks.

Kerr: No. No.

Mrs. Kerr: No. Curry.

Kerr: Parks was the one that wouldn't get on the back of the bus. [Laughter]

Q: Eddie. It's not my day. Give me a break.

Mrs. Kerr: Her maiden was MacMullin. She married a Curry. George Curry.

Q: I see. Okay. Now, Eddie, how many brothers or sisters did you have?

Kerr: Overall I had two brothers and three sisters. But only three of us survived.

Q: I see. I see. Cat, what about you? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mrs. Kerr: Five sisters and four boys. Nine in all.

Q: Eddie Lee, what kind of work did your father do?

Kerr: When he sent for us here, he was working in a place called National Paperboard Company. Was down on Clancey Street in Newark.

Q: National Pickerboard?

Kerr: Paper. Paper.

Q: Paperboard Company.

Kerr: They made boxes.

Q: I see. Okay. Okay.

Kerr: And then him and one of his friends, they used to go around picking up junk because there was no work. It was during the Depression. They built themselves a pushcart and went around picking up junk to make a living. Okay?

Q: What about your mother's occupation? Did she work?

Kerr: My mother, she for a while she worked at they called it Lutheran Memorial Hospital, which is now Clara Mass Hospital. But it used to be on Fourth Avenue in Newark.

Q: And West Market Street, yeah.

Kerr: Yeah. Right.

Q: Catherine, what about your parents? What kind of work did your father and mother do?

Mrs. Kerr: They were farmers.

Q: Now have you changed your name for any reason, for instance, like membership in an organization or ethnic reasons or anything? Have you changed your name?

Kerr: No. Not me.

Q: Cat, what about you?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

Q: If you migrated to Newark, when did you first decide to leave home?

Kerr: Talking to me or my wife?

Q: Both, either one of you answer these questions.

Kerr: Oh, let her answer first.

Mrs. Kerr: Why did I leave home?

Q: Yes. How old were you when you came to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Was I twenty?

Kerr: No. You were twenty-seven when we got married.

Mrs. Kerr: Okay. So say I was about twenty-six, twenty-five.

Q: When you came to Newark. Why did you decide to come to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I was looking for work.

Q: Okay that answers the next question, why did you want to leave home? Was your trip planned well in advance or how did you prepare to leave?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. We. Yes. My cousin lived here. And he came home. And we were on the farm and wasn't doing anything. So he said, why don't you come with me and you can get a job. And we did. And I did.

Q: What year did you come to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: What year? Do you remember?

Kerr: I imagine, I imagine late 48, 49 or something like that. I don't know when you got here. I think you told me you'd been about a year when I met you. I'm not sure.

Mrs. Kerr: I came in 48.

Kerr: That's what I thought.

Q: Okay. What time of the year was it when you came to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: It was fall here, fall.

Q: Did anybody make any attempt to keep you from leaving home?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

Q: Okay. Was this your first trip some distance away from home?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

Q: Where had you gone before that?

Mrs. Kerr: I lived in Ohio.

Q: And where did you say you came from originally, Georgia?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Q: Okay. Mr. Kerr, what about you? Were you born in Newark?

Kerr: No.

Q: How old were you when you came to Newark?

Kerr: Five.

Q: So the other questions wouldn't be relevant, what kind of preparations did you make and all

that. You came with your family. [Laughter] Where did you first go, where did you go first after leaving home? Why and how long did you stay there?

Kerr: Repeat that question.

Q: Where did you first go after leaving home?

Kerr: You mean when I left my parents?

Q: No, no, no. When you left from down south coming to Newark, where did the family go?

Kerr: We came directly to Newark. My father came here to prepare a place for us. You see. And he sent for my mother when he had the place for us to stay. My mother and my brother.

Q: How old were you then?

Kerr: I was five years old.

Q: Catherine, where did you go when you first came to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Ramondon's House.

Kerr: Were you living, was he living on Eighteenth Avenue?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Kerr: Yeah. Okay.

Mrs. Kerr: Eighteenth Avenue. I forget the number.

Q: Who was Ramondon? That was a cousin?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Q: I see okay. Well, the next question you've answered already. Were you brought to Newark by others? If so, by whom? And why did they come to Newark? So you could give me, repeat that answer for me so that we can have some clear understanding. They came to make economic conditions better. Your father was looking for work, and he came and got a job and sent for the rest of his family. And you came, the same thing. Okay. Did anyone tell you about Newark before you came here?

Kerr: Who are you talking to?

Q: Both of you, one of you.

Kerr: Well, she told you already.

Mrs. Kerr: My cousin.

Kerr: But see in my case, as I say, I didn't know anything about it. All I knew is I was with my mother because my father was here. I didn't even know where he was. So it's 1929, in November, when we came here, and it was wintertime and I started school the following spring. The Warren Street School.

Q: Do you have any idea at this point why Lester chose Newark to come to?

Kerr: None whatever.

Q: And Catherine you came because somebody that lived here and invited you to come.

Mrs. Kerr: [Voice too low to hear]

Q: Yeah. Why not.

Mrs. Kerr: My cousin's name was, American name, Cleo Highsmith. And he had changed to the Muslim name, Mussid Ramadan..

Q: Okay, that's good. Now let me say if I can repeat that. His name was?

Mrs. Kerr: Cleo Highsmith.

Q: Cleo Highsmith. And he changed to a Muslim name and that name was what?

Mrs. Kerr: Mussid Ramadan.

Q: Mussid Ramadan.

Mrs. Kerr: [Voice too low to hear]

Q: How did you travel when you were leaving the south to come to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Quite interesting. I came on the train. For the first time I had ever been on a train, and I was frightened out of my wits. And I came up and I was on the train, and Jessie Owens was on that same train. That's quite interesting. And I was so, you know, he couldn't get me up to go to the restaurant. The only thing I moved for was to go to the bathroom. I wouldn't eat anything because I had my lunch and that, but I was scared to death.

Q: Did you know who Jessie Owens was at the time?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. He sit on the seat with me. He knew I was frightened. You know, and he tried to get me to go to the cafeteria. And I wouldn't go. I wouldn't move. And the young lady behind me said, you are a fool. I would be all in his face.

Q: How old were you at the time?

Mrs. Kerr: Let me see.

Kerr: What year was it. Must have been about twenty, you had to be at least twenty-six. I don't know how old you were.

Q: Eddie Lee, what about yourself? I'm sorry, go ahead Cat.

Mrs. Kerr: I thought it was over when I got off that train and my cousin met me and I went home. And I told him that I had met Jessie Owens on the train. He said, oh, you know you wouldn't know Jessie Owens from nobody else. And within three days, Jessie Owens came to the address where I was staying because I had given it to him. He asked me. And he came to the address. Came to see me. I wasn't at home, and my cousin said, oh, she's not home. And I don't think you should come back to see her. This is what he told him. I don't think you should come back to see her. So he didn't. But he sit down and wrote me a nice letter.

Q: For the benefit of those who may not know, who was Jessie Owens?

Kerr: You mean to tell me you don't know who Jessie Owens is?

Q: Many people don't know who Jessie Owens is.

Kerr: He was, I forget how many medals he won in 19, was it 1939?

Q: 36 I think it was.

Kerr: 36 Olympics. It was in Germany.

Q: In Germany, and Hitler didn't want to acknowledge him. [Cross talk] We know that, but a lot of people who will listen to this tape who won't know who Jessie Owens was. That's why I asked you that question. Okay. Mr. Kerr you were only five years old. Do you remember anything about your trip from down south to Newark?

Kerr: All I remember is getting on the train and getting off. [Laughter] I think my father met us at the station. At the old, Penn Station at that time I don't believe is where it is now. I think that station was built around 1933 with WPA funds. I don't think my father worked on the Penn Station. But anyway, there's a lot of work that Roosevelt, the president, had started people doing because there wasn't no work. He started a lot of programs. Penn Station was one of the projects he built. And it was finished in 1933. And the watershed, the Pequannock Watershed, up in Newark that was built with WPA funds. My father worked up there. Do you remember Mr. Jackson, Sylvia's father?

Q: No.

Kerr: He worked up there too. A lot of work. I mean, there's a lot of things that the Democrats did back then. That's why I'm a Democrat today.

Q: I'm glad you said that. Okay. What segregated facilities were there as you came to Newark, and where did you sit on the train or on the bus?

Kerr: Well, we were on a train, but I don't know where we sat. As I say, I remember, I don't remember getting on, I just remember getting off right here. I don't remember any of that. I was too young really. To even pay any attention.

Q: Right. Well, Cat, in addition to being fortunate enough to sit alongside Jessie Owens, do you remember was the car segregated? Were there whites and blacks in the same car?

Mrs. Kerr: Blacks was only, no, I was segregated.

Q: Okay. All right. Was the train clean? Was it crowded?

Mrs. Kerr: Very crowded.

Q: Eddie, do you remember whether the train was crowded that you came on?

Kerr: I don't remember the ride at all.

Q: Was there food available on the train?

Mrs. Kerr: It was.

Q: What kind of food did you bring? Did you bring anything with you? Did you pack a lunch like we were?

Mrs. Kerr: You don't want to hear this.

Q: Yes. I do.

Mrs. Kerr: My mother always made bread. And we had ham. And I had a couple of ham biscuits with it, and then she made a jelly too. So I had jelly. And that was a big meal. I wasn't going anyplace.

Q: Mr. Kerr, having known your mother as well as I did, I know that you guys had food on that

train.

Kerr: Yeah. We sure had a shoebox. I wouldn't doubt it at all. [Laughter]

Q: Okay. What segregated facilities did you encounter on the way? Did the train stop and you had to get off and go to the bathroom or get some water or something else that you wanted?

Mrs. Kerr: We had, the bathroom was on the train.

Q: Did you have to stop along the way? Did you get off the train anywhere between Georgia and Newark?

Mrs Kerr: No.

Q: What about your trip?

Kerr: I wouldn't remember.

Q: Okay. What happened when you arrived in Newark and who met you?

Kerr: Evidently it was my father. I don't recall for certain, but I imagine it was him because my mother didn't know anybody else here.

Q: Catherine, what about you? Did somebody meet your train?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. My cousin Ramadan met me on the train.

Q: Did you plan to return to the south?

Kerr: Who me?

Q: Yeah. The families. Either one of you. Did you, since you were adult, did you plan at the time you left coming here, did you anticipate that you would stay or did you think that you might go back?

Mrs. Kerr: No. I don't think I would plan to go back. I wanted to make a better living, you know, life.

Q: Well, Eddie Lee, it wasn't up to you. You were such a little tyke until you, you would not have thought about going back. Did you know anybody who came to Newark around the time that you came and stayed for a short while and then went back south?

Mrs. Kerr: I didn't know anyone.

Q: What about you Eddie? Do you know anybody, from the time that you came here, of course, there have been many people who came to Newark and went back south to live. And I think even these recent years more and more people, as they get to where we are now, they are going back south to live.

Kerr: The time these friends, well, you know, people back then had what they call extended families. Which not relatives, but they were supposed to be a member of the family. And I don't recall any of them going back. The people that I met when I first came and got to know, I mean, they were around until death parted them as far as I could.

Q: Did you ever help anybody to leave the south to come to Newark to live?

Kerr: I didn't spend any time in the south really. Not, still not. But wait a minute, you talk about, wait a minute. We did after we got married. We did. Yeah. If that's what you're talking about.

Q: Yeah. Anybody.

Kerr: Go ahead.

Mrs. Kerr: All my sisters came through me to get to New Jersey. And Jimmie came, my brother. And Odis came. Two brothers. They all came through me to get. You know, they'd come up here and stay and then they'd get on their own.

Q: Did any of them return to the south?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, yes, my brother's there now. My sister's there. She retired.

Kerr: You know Alice, don't you. Her sister.

Q: She used to live on Sixth Street.

Mrs. Kerr: Yeah, that's right. She's back in Georgia now, retired.

Q: I see. Eddie, what about you? Did any of your relatives return to the south?

Kerr: Not blood relatives. I think my uncle through marriage. When he retired, my aunt had died, he went back south. But the rest of them that came to Newark, they never went back. Now I have another uncle. He stayed in New York. And he's younger than I am, and he went back. Well, he's down in Florida now I believe.

Q: Did any of your, any of Lester's or Ella's brothers or sisters come to Newark because of Ella and Lester having come first?

Kerr: Yeah. Right. All of them that came here.

Q: Okay. How would you describe your fellow migrants? Those who left the south for Newark around the time you did. Were they young, were they old, were they single or were they married, were they educated or uneducated?

Kerr: Let's see. Relatives you're speaking of now or just any?

Q: Fellow migrants. Anyone you know who came from the south.

Kerr: Primarily, I can't speak for friends. I can speak for family. Now my mother's brother and her sister, they came and they lived with us until they. Buster, he lived with us until he passed. But my aunt, Priscilla, she got married, she moved away. But they stayed with us for many years. And then my, three of my father's brothers. They came here because I think Uncle John came first, didn't he.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Kerr: And then, no Uncle Henry. Anyway, one of them two. They came along about the same time see. And then my Uncle George, he came last of all. And they lived across the hall from us on Livingston Street. But my Uncle George, he stayed with us until he got on his feet, and then he got his own place.

Q: How many times have you returned to your home in the south since you came to Newark? You remember?

Kerr: My mother would never take me down there.

Q: Catherine, how often have you gone back?

Mrs. Kerr: Several times. Several times.

Kerr: My mother said she didn't want to lose me.

Q: Well, I couldn't blame her.

Kerr: She said I'd be the first to disappear. [Laughter]

Q: Well, see, I happen to remember you were just a young man, probably just out of college when I first met you. And I would tend to agree with Alice. [Laughter] No thanks. Do you think of your southern birthplace, Georgia, do you think of that as home now, or has Newark become home?

Mrs. Kerr: Home, Georgia will always be home to me.

Kerr: Not knowing anything about it, it's a foreign country as far as I'm concerned. I have no use for Georgia or anyplace except Newark. Let's put it that way.

Q: Yeah. Okay. I can understand that. Do you think that, Cat, at some place you might want to go back to Georgia to live?

Kerr: Right now.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Q: Okay. Why would you want to go back there to live?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I think it's. Well, I would hope that it was more peaceful. See, we're from the country. And you'd have your, you can raise all of your food, like there.

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Q: Your mother did a lot of canning and preparing foods in the summer.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Q: So tell us about that.

Mrs. Kerr: We would always have a garden. And my father planted everything that would grow and produce. And our job with mother was to can and preserve these things. Peaches and apples, we'd but up in little slices and put them up on top of the roof in the hot sun and they dried. You know, apples. We had, that's what we made our fried pies and pies out of, and it was just marvelous. We can't go to the store. She would have shelves lined up in a space that quart, half gallon and pint. Whatever kind of vegetables you wanted were there. And they killed their livestock, like the pig. They cured the hams. And beef, they canned beef. We had a canner. You know, big canner. And canned in tin cans. And we would kill the livestock and can it. You didn't have to go out in the wintertime, wooshing like that. It was right in that closet.

Q: Eddie, what about your family? Did your mother, did she do those kinds of things to make preparations so that in the? Have much of that have you continued since you've been in Newark?

Kerr: Well, to take your first question first I don't recall my mother doing any canning or anything. Because as I say, we just barely, we went from hand to mouth. Because as I say, it was 29 when we got here, and as far as I'm concerned the Depression is still on. They never got over it.

Q: So now you're relating your experiences after you had come to Newark. But if you were only five years old, so you wouldn't remember what they did back then.

Kerr: No. I wouldn't know anything about that. However, the hand to mouth thing yes. I mean, nobody was poor because nobody had anything. So that was the great equalizer. And it didn't

matter what color you were or what ethnic group you belonged to, you were equal. Okay.

Q: Okay. So, now, again I happen to know that you do a lot of gardening, and, Catherine, you still do a lot of canning and preserving of food. So those are traditions that you brought from the south that you have continued since you have been in Newark. That's very interesting. What was your first impressions of Newark? Once you got old enough to pay attention to your environment, what was your impressions? Of course, your impressions were developed as you grew, as you got older, you began to see things in different kinds of light. But let me ask you, Catherine, what was your first impression of Newark when you got here?

Mrs Kerr: Big city. And you could, you know, all I wanted was a job when I came here, you know. And I found one. Beautiful place.

Q: So, now, Eddie, as far as your experiences go, you came to Newark when you were five years old, so you have grown into Newark, and you have seen the changes that have happened in Newark as you grew. So maybe you would like to tell me about some of those changes that you saw when you first old enough to observe social conditions and work experiences, etc.

Kerr: The social conditions, as I said, the first place we lived in was owned by an Italian guy, and I think he lived in the building or had a store on the first. I forget now exactly. But anyhow, housing was semi-integrated. Okay? The schools were totally integrated. Now I didn't know the difference between segregation and integration at the time. But all I know that's the way it was. Okay? I didn't know there was a difference til much later when I was around fourteen, fifteen years old. Then I found that there was a difference. Okay. When I started going to high school. Now the neighborhoods were integrated. Now the first neighborhood I lived in was Jews, as we call ourselves now, blacks, and what do you call it, Italians and Greeks. The first neighborhood I lived in.

Q: And what street was that in Newark?

Kerr: I lived on Norfolk Street at first between Hartford and Warren, and then we moved over to Hoyt Street on the corner of Bleeker. And the area was the same because I went to the same school. The neighborhoods were the same. There was no difference in them. And the house we lived in there was owned by an Italian guy, but it was all black people living in it and it was a six family. The first family was a two family house. Okay? Now, when we moved from there, we moved on Warren Street. You know that church on the corner of Wilshire and Warren?

Q: Yes.

Kerr: Okay. Well, I still went to Warren Street School, see. And we lived in that block there. It was a one family house owned by a black woman. Okay? And it was dirt floors and the rest of that stuff. Okay? That's the first time we had a dirt floor. Okay. But the toilet was outside. In fact, all three places the toilet was outside. There was no hot and cold running water. You had a coal stove in the kitchen and an oil heater up front, a coal heater in those days. Okay? And so now and that's in all three places. Okay. Now the fourth place on Warren Street the same thing, only it was a six, it had six floors. Three floors with the store front on the two bottom floors and apartments upstairs, but it was two, second and third floor there was two families on each floor. You remember Deacon Brown and Sister Brown?

Q: Yes.

Kerr: Well, they lived there on 230 Warren Street with us. So now, that where we met them. And the church was on the first floor. And the store on the one side and Black Light on the other, next door to it, see, the church we went to.

Q: What was the name of the church?

Kerr: Black Light they called it. And it later became St. John's. Okay?

Q: Little bit of history. That's where I came in. [Laughter]

Kerr: Now getting back to social. Now the social norms, as I said, to try and answer your question, I had to give you the background first where I was coming from. As I said, nobody had nothing. The Jews mostly had the stores, and the Italians had most of the houses. Okay? In those days that I'm talking about. But I found out later on that a whole lot of black folks had houses over in that area too. Around City Hospital, where City Hospital is now, but they raped the neighborhood and built the university.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Kerr: Okay. And that was the first place where black folks really owned property in the City of Newark, see.

Q: In the Central Ward, the old First Ward.

Kerr: Yeah. Right. Right. See. And, you know something, that was one of the contributors of the 1967 riot when they took them houses away from them people. But, however, now getting back to social. Okay. There were, like the public places, like taverns and bowling alleys, lily white. They had signs up in the windows saying no shines in the taverns. Okay? [Laughter] They didn't mean shoe shines either. [Laughter] Okay. Now you go in there, you're go in there, you're gonna get tan up there, but don't wait your time, don't waste no coming back. Okay? The neighborhoods, all the neighborhoods I lived in at the time were integrated. When we moved over on Livingston Street, the ethnic groups changed that was all. It was mostly like Pollacks, a lot of Jews, more Jews over there than it was on the other side of town, and Irish. Some of the Irish people there too. I hadn't run into many Irish over there in Warren Street School. And had a few Mexicans come to think about it. But not that many. I only saw about two or three families, but they was there. See. And naturally, that's where the blacks were politically strong. They called it the old Cleary Ward.

And the only movie that I can recall going to was the National that was integrated. The Savvoy, oh wait, wait, Essex was not bad but only you sat upstairs anyhow, but you didn't realized you was being segregated against. The Savvoy, they didn't make no bones about you had to sit upstairs. Okay? The bowling alleys you could set pins but you couldn't bowl. Okay? So the, what do you call, the bath houses, there's one bath house, public bath house you could go to, and that's on the corner of Montgomery and Charleston. The rest of them you had to belong to a certain ethnic groups to be able to come in.

Q: What years are we talking about roughly?

Kerr: What years are we talking about? I'm talking about now, let's see, I started school in 19, see we got here in 29, I started school in 1930. Okay? Now I was six years old when I started school. Okay, now, we moved, when we moved to Livingston Street, I was about eleven years old, eleven or twelve years old. Okay? I lived on the other side of town all that time. And that's when I went, I went to junior high, I went to Cleveland Junior High School when I moved over there. Okay? Now, as I say, junior high was still level. The playing field was level. When I got to the ninth grade, a different story. When we got to Arts High, blacks and whites started segregating each other. It was primarily the fellows. I don't know why, but that's what it was, see. Because, I mean, we saw the difference, I was going to class, and we saw the difference. And so we treated them like they treated us. We didn't give a rap about them. In fact, you know the house on the corner of Waverly and Belmont?

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

Kerr: Once a year we had a knockdown, dragout over there. You know why? The white guys said no niggers allowed on this side of the street. [Laughter] So we had to prove that we were going to walk that side of the street.

Q: Catherine, what were your experiences when you first got to Newark as far as the social

climate was concerned?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I think two things. My cousin was driving the green taxi. And I had some reason to go over to the stand while he was working. And he sent me someplace. When I got back, he was asking my cousin why you haven't introduced me to your cousin. You know, he was asking my cousin, why haven't you introduced me to your cousin. Well, she just got around here. So he introduced me to Eddie. And I think Eddie, we started. I went home and I straightened my hair and got dressed. And he made the date, and where did you take me? He took me someplace.

Kerr: Went to Asbury Park.

Mrs. Kerr: Went to Asbury. I don't know if you all want to know that story. [Laughter]

Kerr: Let me tell you something. You know why we had to go to Asbury Park. We wanted to go someplace where they had like amusements, and all the things down the seashore, blacks couldn't go to it. But Asbury Park has always been socialized for the blacks in New Jersey. That was the beach, like Jones Beach over in New York. Okay? But, however, see, how we really met. I didn't meet he through him. She told me he was her cousin. Because what happened, I was sitting on the stand one day, and my boss, she lived next door to my boss, at Stratford Place. I didn't know her at the time. And so he had told me to bring the car over at noon time. He wanted to do something to it. So I was watching the car, getting to close to twelve o'clock, and I ain't made nothing, I ain't even made enough money to buy gas. Okay? So now she walks up to me. I was laying back. I see her coming down the street. So she walks over. How you doing, Miss. Stratford Place. I said, Stratford Place. I said, what number. She said, fifty-one. He's my boss is 53. I said to myself I ain't gonna make no money. [Laughter] So when she said to me, how much is it? I said, don't worry about it; I gotta go over there anyhow. I said, the ride's on me. [Laughter] That's how I met her. Then we got to talking, and that's when I asked Ramadan later on. She told me he was her cousin. That's how it was. Later on, I said, how come you didn't introduce me. That's how we met. But I don't think we went to Asbury that same night. It was

about two or three, about a month or so later.

Mrs. Kerr: No. It wasn't a month.

Kerr: It wasn't that much later.

Mrs. Kerr: About two weeks.

Kerr: Two weeks later. It was kind of fast, wasn't it?

Mrs. Kerr: It was fast. And he took me to Atlantic City.

Kerr: No. It was Asbury Park.

Mrs. Kerr: Asbury Park. And, you know, being from the country, I didn't know nothing. You know, we didn't. In my family, we didn't drink or smoke. My father didn't drink. My father didn't smoke. So I'm in this country up here, and I don't want them to know that I am so dumb.

Kerr: Yeah, I had another two people with me. Another friend of mine and his girl friend. That's what she's talking about. Go ahead.

Mrs. Kerr: I didn't want them to know that I was so dumb. I didn't know one drink from the other one. So he says to me, what would you have to drink? And I said, the same thing you are drinking. And you know what he did?

Kerr: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. She ain't telling, telling the story right, but she's forgot some part of it. I was drinking boilermakers.

Q: What's a boilermaker?

Kerr: A boilermaker is a shot and a beer. And a double shot and a beer at that. That's what I was drinking. And she told me she didn't drink at all. I looked at her, I said, what you want? [Laughter] And she said, the same thing I. I said, you sure? [Laughter]

Mrs. Kerr: I didn't know what it was. You know. And he's saying. I took a couple of drinks out of that and everything got funny.

Kerr: She passed out.

Mrs. Kerr: Wheww! No. It got so funny to me, and I just started to giggle. So he says to his friend, man, cmon, let's get this woman out of here. She is drunk. [Laughter] But that was my first date out with him. And I tell you he made me crawl up the steps at the place where I was living. 53 Stratford Place. Was whites was the owners there. And he wouldn't even get out of the car to help me. I had to crawl up them steps.

Kerr: Teach her a lesson. Don't get drunk. Okay? Now anybody else might have mistreated her totally.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. But he didn't, he sit in the car and let me fall down.

Kerr: But she didn't, what she saying before about social, well, social and work part. Cause as I said there was no jobs, and those neighborhoods I lived in initially, I mean, they were integrated. Except for I didn't realize back then that the segregated part of the town. I was so young. Before I got to fourteen, fifteen years old. Then it dawned on me what was happening. Okay. But now the thing was this about the green cabs. Green Cab was an association of black owners, cab owners. There's another one called Black and White. It's a smaller company. A black man could not drive one of them red tops or one of them centuries or whatever you want to call them, them other cabs. He could not drive one. The only job you could get driving a cab would be at the Black and White which only had three of them or the Green which had thirty. Okay? And there's

an association of owners, I think about half a dozen owners owned all of them. But now, that's what. And then, okay, now to Penn Station. Okay? When you go down to Penn Station, you get in a line, white folks would walk around you. It could be pouring down rain, and they would not get in that cab with the black driver. And if they, if the weather was so bad so they didn't have no choice. Okay, say it was three people, three white people, and two of them was. No, say it was four. Okay. And so you had a five passenger car. So you put three in the back and two up front. So now what would happen is this. The guy, the male that was with, this white male, he would get in the car front first and sit between the black driver and the white woman. He would not let the woman sit beside that black driver. And you know something, I wouldn't help him in and out of the doggone thing. You get in the best way you can. You get out the best way. I wouldn't even put the luggage in the trunk.

Q: Well, that says to me that race relations without being completely deliberate, were just there, just happened. If you were black, you saw things from one perspective. If you were white, you say it from another. And has it changed so greatly since then?

Kerr: Well, let me say this. It started to change once upon a time. But you know something, it's like a wheel and it keeps on turning. Therefore, one halfway up and next day you're halfway down and next thing you're on the bottom totally. Okay? Think about it. It's a wheel.

Q: Yes. I agree with that. Okay, now, where did you do shopping? Catherine, I will ask you that first. Where did you guys shop when you first came to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Oh, let's see. The A&P. The A&P up on Prince Street, in Prince Street.

Kerr: No. There was an A&P on the corner of Belmont and Waverly. I don't know where you did yours. That's where my mother used to do all hers.

Mrs. Kerr: I think that's where we did. On the weekend, when I got paid, everyone had to go

half. Whatever I have, I would go down and get it.

Q: What about for like clothing and household goods and what not? Where did you buy those kinds of things?

Mrs. Kerr: If I bought anything, it would be downtown. I used to buy some fabrics, you know, at the five and dime stores down there and buy yards of fabric, and come home and make it. Sometimes I had to sew it up by hand, but it was just as good.

Q: How did you, how were you treated in those shops, in those stores, Eddie, both of you?

Mrs. Kerr: It was so much better than what it was in the south. So they treated me good. You know. Down south you could not go in some of those stores, and pick up something that you see, look at it. You couldn't do that. That clerk had to do that for you. So it was much better here walking in the stores. If you wanted to look at that fabric, you could. And buy.

Q: Mr Kerr, when did you first begin to notice the attitudes of race?

Kerr: Well, as I told you before, when I got about fourteen, fifteen years old when I first noticed it, absolutely noticed what was going on. Prior to that, everything was. But as far as the stores, I mean, before I started junior high school, well, you actually questioned once before about credit. Well, you see, we got what they call relief checks. Now they call them welfare checks now. But you had to work for them. They didn't give them to you. But, however, you set up a credit with this, as I said mostly Jews owned the food stores, and set up a credit line with them. And my father's account, as head, count with a --

Q: Calculator.

Kerr: They could never steal from us. But, however, see, I mean, food was cheap. You get three

pounds of rice for a dime. And the same thing with fish and greens, all that kind of stuff. Cause they had to have what you call southern food market. You made that question once before, see. And them Jews were smart. I give them credit for it. Whatever you want, that Jew, directly foods from the south, they had them for you. Had to go to certain markets to get them, but they had them for you. Live chickens, the whole darn works. And they would treat you decent. I mean, I never had any problem with them anyhow. But the thing was I'm speaking about stores and working. All right, Bamberger's, when I came out of service, only had two black people working there. Okay. One of them is a friend of mine's wife, and you think she's white when you first looked at her. She worked in the elevator. There was a black guy pushing a broom. Bell Telephone on Washington Street, down there, and I think this is one of the hundred street buildings over there. They only had, they had some female, I don't remember seeing any black men working there at Bell Tel. But in those capacities. Same thing with Public Service. Okay? But, however, the females that I saw working at Bell, you, I mean, you had to look close to find out, to determine whether they were white or black. It was all in that skin color. Okay? Whether you got a good job, whether how you were treated as far as working for. Number One. Number Two, the unions. The unions were mostly lily white. You could not get a job in most places if you didn't belong to a union. And the unions, in fact, the American Machinists Union. I tried to get a job on the machine shop just before I went into service. And I had all the qualifications. The guy didn't believe I could do the things I said I could do. I showed him a letter of recommendation. He says, can you do everything on that letter? I said sure. He says, let me see you. I said, I don't have my tools with me. He said, we got tools. So he got his chief inspector to set me up with tools and let me go and draw the material I needed from stock. Okay. He said, you grind your own tool bits? I said, sure. He grinds up, start them up on the lathe. Went to the milling machine. I made about four different operations. He told me to make six pieces. When I saw the blueprint, looked like one of them, what do you call that plane that crashed here, that Flight 800. That's where. I had never seen a blueprint like that in my life. But I read it off to him. So now he had me do the job for him. So I make six pieces. I forget how, but I made six of them. And I say, you want me to harden them tools. He said, no, I don't want you working with cyanide, it might kill you. But I'm going to tell you, I can't hire you. [Laughter] He said, nope. He says

nobody has ever walked in this place that can do the things that you just did. He said, but I can't hire you because you can only stay for thirty days and then you got to get in the union. The union ain't gonna hire you. He said, go find some other job in a non-union shop.

Q: The next question was was there any resentment against the stores in the neighborhood, not only by blacks?

Kerr: Not that I know of.

Q: Catherine, no, no resentment? You just, whatever conditions as were laid out there you abided by that? You did what you had to do in order to?

Mrs. Kerr: Right.

Kerr: Well, it wasn't. It wasn't a matter of fact where they had a sign up. See. Where you would, they start the crap before you got in the door. Except like I told you about them signs up in the taverns, no shines in the window before you even got inside.

Q: And you didn't resent that, you guys didn't resent that at the time?

Kerr: Well, what the hell, everybody else was doing it, so what's the big deal? [Laughter] I'm serious. It was a way of life.

Q: Okay. All right. Did local stores offer you credit? Or did this influence your decision to shop at those stores? I think you mentioned that briefly about.

Kerr: Yeah. Well, when I was old enough to make my money to buy my own stuff, I mean, I didn't have no credit. I don't remember having any credit. In fact, we buy cash now because I didn't have no credit when we got married. I couldn't buy, I couldn't buy a pound of sugar on

credit. [Laughter]

Q: So there was no such thing as accounts at those stores. Like now you can open an account at Macy's or?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

Q: Or Hanes, or wherever. You couldn't get an account at a store then.

Kerr: And they had these door-to-door salesmen come around selling stuff three times the value, and coming every week and getting the dime or dollar, as the case may be. And I swore by Christ that would never happen to me. Kathleen will tell you about that.

Q: And the next question is multi-faceted. And what we want to know is how would you compare your experiences in the south with your new experiences in Newark with respect to the following. When you came to Newark, were you able to purchase dry goods and foods that were familiar to you in the south?

Kerr: My mother did all that. And I'm a soul food eater. I don't care for that fancy food that you make up here. And I think she mentioned something about the canning they were doing that. And we weren't fortunate enough to have a garden, so we didn't do any canning, had to buy prepared foods.

Q: Okay. What do you know about the appearance of soul food in Newark?

Kerr: It's the only food I ever knew. I didn't know any other food.

Q: What do you refer to as soul food? What are we talking about when we talk about soul food?

Kerr: Well, ethnic foods for want of another name, okay?

Q: Well, for us it was soul food before it became ethnic food. [Laughter]

Kerr: Black eyed peas and corn bread. Collard greens and ham hocks. [Laughter]

Mrs. Kerr: That's the way it went. So you make a whole meal out of it, you know, with the ham hocks and just the beans.

Q: And I have to tell you I still prefer that kind of food.

Kerr: Tell me about it. Steaks I ain't never liked.

Q: No, never liked steak?

Kerr: I still don't like it.

Q: Well, I like steaks. I'm one of those persons who will eat anything that does not eat me first.

Kerr: Well, see my mother. I could tell when we was going to have steak. Cause on Saturday night my mother was already cooking for Sunday morning, she'd have that little meat tenderizer. BAM, BAM, BAM, BAM.

Q: Your mother was one of the best cooks. She used to babysit my kids. I loved going to Ella's house believe me. Those sweet potato pies that that girl used to make.

Kerr: Oh yes. Tell me about it.

Q: In what ways if any did people in Newark dress differently from people in your southern

home?

Kerr: Well, I grew up in Newark so I don't know how they. Well, I could say it this way. As a child, when I grew up, I mean, you could tell how old a boy was by what he was wearing. For a short while he wore short pants. And then as he got in the sixth grade and grade school he wore knickers. And when he got to be a certain age, then he put on long pants.

Q: Okay. Knickers were what Eddie Lee?

Kerr: You don't know what knickers are?

Q: I know, but some people listening to this tape may not know.

Kerr: Well, if you seen them old pictures of the golf players, with the pants with the trousers on that grabs at the knee. That was knickers. That was a knicker. Okay?

Q: Another name for it was knee pants, we used to call them.

Kerr: Yeah. Right. We never called them, we called them. Knee pants was the shorts. We called them. I hated them. Oh I couldn't wait to get to be man so I could wear me some long pants.

Q: Were people, were relatives and friends as helpful and supportive here in Newark as they had been in your southern home? Were you part of an extended family in Newark?

Kerr: In Newark, yes. I mean, but I don't know anything about the south. But an extended family to this extent. Some philosopher one time said, he said, it takes a whole village to raise a child. The whole neighborhood raised children then.

Q: Cat, what about your experiences? Were people here as supportive as they had been in Georgia?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, yes. I would say. Because down south you had your family. And when we were coming, you had just more than a lot of family. Because you had food which was very big. We didn't have to spend any money to provide all the food. All we had to do was provide the clothes. We would pick the cotton, took it to the gin, got the money, and that's when we got our clothes.

Kerr: You can make that extended family part, if you start acting up on your way home from school or whatever, some guy walking, might not even know you, I'm going to tell your daddy on you boy. Shoot.

Mrs. Kerr: Well, when we were coming up, going to school, walking three miles one way and three miles back, and that [voice too low to hear]. And the white man saw it. So nobody didn't think anything of it. [voice too low] When we got home, my father called me in the room. He said let me see your neck. And I said, my neck. He said, yeah, let me see your neck.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Mrs. Kerr: Bite on my neck. And I, you know, covered it up so that my father wouldn't see it. Covered it up so my father wouldn't see it. So what had happened, an old white man monitored us from school, you know, because we had to pass by their house on the dirt roads. And they would be watching us. And they saw that guy with the knife. And they saw when he laid the knife. What he did, the white man called another white man over where we lived and told Mr. George I think you ought to look at your daughter's neck because I saw a guy lay a knife on her neck. That's what he told that other white guy. And that white guy got on his horse and went to my father's house and told him. I come in the yard. And, you know, come here girl. Let me see what's wrong with you. Where did that guy lay that knife at. What knife? Yeah. Where did he, come

here. And it was a sore, and I didn't get no beating for it. But let me tell you one thing, the guy that did it, my father got on his horse and went to that man's house. And told him what the white man said. And he said, I seen the scar on her neck. I know he did it because Mr. such and such a man called, come over here and told me. He said, you better go to the man. And he went that, oh that man liked to kill that kid. You know, coming home from school. Whew!

Kerr: Well, like I was saying, even here in our neighborhood, it didn't have to be white, black or whatever, I mean, you had to give an adult respect due an adult. And if you didn't. You didn't sass your teachers out. If the teacher said, sit in the hole, then she'd give you a note to take home to your mother. Don't give it to her now.

Q: That gets down to the differences in the respect that we had to show to elders in our day and the respect that we see young people showing or not showing now.

Kerr: Not even to each other. They got no respect for each other.

Q: Right. My next question was did you call people aunt and cousin here in Newark when they were really not a relative? How did you address older people when you came to Newark?

Kerr: Well, if it was a total stranger, we addressed them as Mr. or Miss or Mrs. whatever the case may be. If it was someone, you know, in the group, a part of the group and they belonged to the church, you called them sister, brother or deacon or whatever. Okay? Or reverend. Okay? But you never, you never, I mean, you never called them by their first name. Never! [Laughter]

Q: Kathleen, was it the same with you where you grew up? How did you address people before you came to Newark and what differences were there after you had gotten here?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, down south, you must have a handle. You know, that is what they say. It is either Mr. or Mrs., and it could be, you know, say a person nineteen or twenty years old, or

professional person, Mr. or Miss. Here, the difference where I've always taught my kids here, was respect for the grown person. You know, you walk up and call them by their first name. And I never taught them that.

Q: When did you begin to see differences in the way that young people related to older persons?

Kerr: When I began to see the difference?

Q: Yeah.

Kerr: After I became a policeman.

Q: Okay.

Kerr: That was in, well, 58 when I joined the force. Prior to the force, I didn't notice. I began to notice it then.

Q: What holidays were celebrated, how did you celebrate holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Fourth of July and Thanksgiving? How were they celebrated differently in the south than it was or is here?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, in the south, Christmas they had, you know, at Chirstmastime they would bake and most cake. Ten and twelve cakes. And they'd put them in a dresser drawer like this. You know, just fold them and put in, wrap towels around them and put it in the dresser drawer. Now I don't know. They told us that we had to have this here for Santa Claus. Santa Claus was gonna take cake, you know, when he comes. And you would get up, two out of toys and one for the drawer. I don't know what mama used to do with the cakes. But Santa Claus or somebody sure took a lot of cakes out of that drawer. [Laughter] We were, oh, what happened to the cakes. You know, Santa Claus, there must have been four or five Santa Clauses. But they sure took a lot

of cakes. That's what I remember about Christmas. My brother said, I'll be so glad when we be grown so we don't have our cakes to leave them like this.

Q: What about other holidays like Thanksgiving and Fourth of July?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I don't think the Fourth of July down south meant so much to us as did Thanksgiving. You know, Thanksgiving everybody would gather, you know, and get invited to other homes. But this Fourth of July, I don't think firecrackers were so plentiful then. We'd just have a good time. Maybe go down to the creek, catch fish or something like that.

Q: Eddie, what about your earliest recollection of celebration of Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, those holidays?

Kerr: Let's start with Christmas. I never got any toys for Christmas. It didn't mean nothing to me. My family couldn't afford those toys. I might have got an apple or maybe a shirt, a pair of pants or something like that. So, the other holidays, what did you say Easter next? Well, Easter was a day that, you know, where we got new clothes. And to me, and now take for what it's worth, my mother had bought a new suit for my brother and for myself for Easter. And we weren't supposed to wear it until Easter. My brother didn't live to see, he got killed, a truck backed over him a week before. That was his funeral suit. Today, if I get anything of anybody and they see it and want it, they get it because Easter's a special day. Fourth of July, that was a day when like Kathleen was saying, we'd shoot off a lot of fireworks and all that kind of stuff. Cause I never cared for the noise myself. Didn't hurt my ears, I just never cared for the noise. And I couldn't see the sense in it. I never did see the sense in all them fireworks. In Newark, we used to have a lot of parades. They had an Easter parade here, they had a Thanksgiving day parade. In Newark, not just in New York City. And let's see, had a Valentine's Day parade, Memorial Day parade, a lot of parades. All them holidays were celebrated here. And then they tried to teach you patriotism and all that kind of stuff, see. Excuse the expression, but. [Laughter] But, however, now Thanksgiving like Kathleen was saying that was, always has been a big day. And I guess I outgrew my love for

turkey, but I still like the rest of, everything else that goes along with it. Especially the dressing.

Q: Me too. That's my favorite. Dressing and brown gravy.

Kerr: But I don't know what happens in the southern states though. I was never there for any of those holidays.

Q: Use of intoxicants and other substances, how did the use of items like liquor, drugs, tobacco, etc, pipes, cigars, cigarettes, snuffs, chewing tobacco in Newark compare with their use in your southern home? And what about substances like clay dirt and starch?

Kerr: Clay dirt I don't know anything about. Starch, my mother used to eat a lot of starch. Argo Starch. So, I mean, I'm aware of that. In fact, I tried it a few times, but I couldn't see why they would do it really. It didn't have no taste to it really. But, now, on the other hand. What's the other things?

Q: Like the use of liquor and drugs and tobacco, and etc.

Kerr: Well, I don't recall any of those illicit drugs being a problem when I was growing up. And it might have been, except for marijuana. I remember marijuana being around. But I don't remember no heroin and the rest of that stuff, see. Like cocaine. I mean, it could have been around. I'm not saying it wasn't. But as a child growing up, I don't know anything about it. But now tobacco, well naturally everybody knew, everybody was smoking or chewing or dipping back then, see. So I knew about snuff and tobacco products. But the thing is this, the children weren't allowed to buy it, to indulge in that so to speak. I mean, that was strictly, and you'd get your butt sore if your father caught you smoking or caught you chewing or drinking really. Now I think the first time I had a drink my father offered it to me. I think I was around twelve or thirteen years old. In that age range, from twelve to fourteen, let's put it that way. And I always kept a job doing something. Selling papers or working on the vendor wagon selling fruits and vegetables, whatever

the case may be. So he actually said to me one day, he says, let me have so much money, x number of dollars, cents not dollars. He said, we're gonna get a bottle of whiskey. So I looked at him. I gave him what he asked me for. And he went out and got a bottle of whiskey and he gave me a shot. Okay? In other words, he's introducing me to the stuff. He introduced me to it. I got high off that one shot, and I didn't want no more. And the same. So later on, what we used to do, you know, as kids, we'd get some adult to buy, winos we called them back then, get a bottle of beer and sit behind vacant houses, sit down and be drinking. But other than that. Not as far as the smoking, first time I smoked, first thing I smoked was a stogie. You know what a stogie is?

Q: A cigar. A butt.

Kerr: No it's not a butt. It's a regular cigar, with a real hard one. I'd get one of those doggone things. I had to go to the store for my mother. I had to go to the pushcart wagon. That was what we brought groceries in. I'd get that thing, and I went out of the house, and went to get these groceries. I come back and put the groceries in the wagon, and I slipped on the ice and oh! Oh, you're talking about somebody sick.

Q: How old were you at the time?

Kerr: About twelve or fourteen. But you see, as far as chewing. The first time I tried to chew tobacco was after I got into the service. Was working an ammo dump, a science and ammo dump in Nebraska, and the civilians there said you had to chew tobacco in order to keep that stuff from getting into your system, your blood see. I can tell you something. I tried that tobacco and I don't know when I throwed it up. I had a knot in my stomach as big as this house and it wouldn't come out. I ain't tried no chewing tobacco since then. But see now, as I say, smoking, I smoked for a long time. I didn't stop smoking until about four or five years. I smoked about forty-five years all together. And I never inhaled though. That time I inhaled that cigar, I never inhaled a cigarette or anything else since then. And the doctors that examined my lung, said, they say it was clear. Said you smoke? I said, yeah. They said, why don't you stop? I said what for? Well, it's for your

own health. You know how I stopped. I had tried many times to stop smoking. Major stop for me was a week or two weeks or a month, and go right back again. I had a bad case of phlebitis just before Lucilla, just at the time Lucilla died. My leg blew up like nobody's business. I couldn't walk. I'd get them old crutches out. And I went to see the doctor. He put me in the hospital right away. No, he told me you got to go to the hospital. I said, when? He said yesterday. So I went to the hospital. He sent me over to St. Mike's. And they're on break when I got there. So me, I fooled around til about nine or ten o'clock before I went there that night. And they all, ain't not rush. Finally came and took a look, and what's here. I told them, give them the slip the doctor gave me. They looked at it. The whole staff panicked. Everybody panicked. The doctor was panicked, the staff was panicked. I don't know what they did for me. But nobody would tell me what the problem was. I laid there a whole week, and finally I told her, get me out of here. So they let me out. Finally they let me out. I said, well, what the hell is going. What's the big deal. So he told me, I had, he said it's what Nixon had. He said, you're lucky to be around here. He said you had clots down there. He said if you hadn't, it we hadn't got you when you did, you would have been dead. You know what happens when those clots break loose right. Get you in the lungs, heart, brains.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

Kerr: So now I got the books out and I start reading about phlebitis. Thrombo phlebitis they call it. On the top of everybody's list was stop smoking. Guess what? I ain't smoked since.

[Laughter] It wasn't fear of dying, it was the fear of being able to walk. He says, because I told him. You know, I said, I saw the clots because they went down and then they came back up. My toenails were all black. So he says, so big deal. I said, what do you mean big deal? He said you could have lost your foot. You could have lost all your toes.

Q: When did you first notice drug use and alcohol becoming a social problem for young black folk?

Kerr: When? When I came out of the service in 1942, I think. 48 when I came out, it was 46 when I came out of service. That's when I noticed. Because I heard more about marijuana then, and then heroin had become popular. Coke was top of the line. So everybody couldn't afford Coke. And mostly the black musicians, somebody that's got money was taking Coke. But, however, the first time. I had smoked a butt once, marijuana, and it happened to me like this. It was a barbershop, guy working when I went to the barbershop. And I knew his brother, these two brothers smoked. So I'm in the barbershop, just these two brothers. And they pushed the razor around the neck and said, take a drag. I took one. You got the razor around my neck, ask me if I'll take a draw.

Q: Take a draw for what?

Kerr: Of a marijuana cigarette.

Q: What did it do to you?

Kerr: It didn't do nothing. I was too scared with that razor stuff around my neck. [Laughter] So I ain't been back that barbershop since, and I ain't smoked no marijuana since. In fact, I'm an allergic to it.

Q: Was that a black man who did that?

Kerr: Yeah.

Q: How did the use of such as home remedies, patent medicines and midwives in Newark compare with the use of such in your southern home?

Kerr: I don't know about the midwives, but the patent medicines and home remedies was part of my upbringing.

Q: And has always been from the time that you can remember, even until now we still use home remedies. This is a rather strange question. How did the belief in and practice of such as conjure, voodoo, whodo, and roots in Newark compare with such in your southern home? Did you ever hear of people who believed in voodoo and what else is this? Conjure and whodo and all of that stuff. At home and then here.

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I can say I didn't believe in it. But I almost I saw my brother almost get killed because of the congee assassins. The mantels, my mother was sick. He said, you got to watch this man is coming and he is going to kill your mother. And he's coming from a certain direction. And my father went out with his gun on his back. My brother went with his gun on the front. And down in the country, you know, you got those outhouses. So it was night. And he didn't want to go way out there to the outhouse, so he just went across the road. And on his way back, the father was checking on the front to see if he was still there. He just came around the house and he saw my brother coming toward the steps, just like he said that man was gonna come. Put something on the steps and ma would be dead in the morning. So my brother was coming back to take his position where he was. My father came around the house, dark, pitch dark, and he didn't see nothing but a shadow, you know. Both of them had guns ready loaded. And my father was gonna, he had it, and the guy just kept on coming toward the steps. He said, JP, and he said, yes, papa. My father, he almost killed his son. My father went in the house, he told my mother. We will not watch anymore. If he comes, you will just have to die. He said, we are not gonna watch anymore. I almost killed my son. He said, Sam and I were watching for this thing. People can get your mind worked up. That's what my mama believed that somebody was going to come and take her life. Everybody went to bed. My father said, if you're going up, he said, he come tonight. He don't care. Whoever it is. Everybody went to sleep. All of us went to sleep. And the next morning my mother got up and went on with her life. There's something tricky about that. Some people it is, it can happen. That I believe.

Q: Well, now have you had, have you seen or had any of those experiences or heard of any of them in Newark since you've been here?

Mrs. Kerr: No I haven't heard of any.

Kerr: Well, I have not experienced any, but there used to be a lot of talk about it when I was growing up. In fact, they said, they used to blame the women who gave the girls and not the boys at the time. They said, only take and put a love potion and all that kind. [Cross talk]

Mrs. Kerr: I don't believe it.

Kerr: But you see, and then the, you used to run into like Jamaicans and what not. When I told them that I don't mean them any disrespect. Okay? And you were hated or not. There weren't that many in Newark when I was growing up. If there were, I didn't know it. But they were pretty good with that voodoo and the voodoo stuff and the roots and all the rest of that stuff. See. But I mean, I look at it from this perspective. Okay, you take the witch doctor. Okay? When I say witch doctor, I'm not speaking of any particular ethnic, I'm talking in general. Indians had them. People in the Caribbean have them. People in Africa have witch doctors. Okay? Now they could heal. They were the healers. See they weren't out to hurt you. They were out to heal you ninety percent of the time, you see. Case in point. Penicillin and what is that other one, sulphur, the sulphur drug. The witch doctors in Africa been using them things since time was born. And the white doctors, the western civilization doctors, put it that way. They said it's a bunch of crap. They're no good. Til the Second World War came along. And they got that penicillin and they started, what's the word they use when they make it from chemicals instead of getting through the raw materials?

Q: Generic.

Kerr: No. No. The generic is the raw stuff. Like the mold that grows on the trees in Africa, whatever the hell they're getting it from. See. But anyway the chemical factories and drug factories got it and they started making it. And they found out that the witch doctors knew what they were doing all those years. So, therefore, I mean, there's something to it that makes me

believe in it more so than I do this crap these doctors prescribe for you really. Cause I don't think they know what they hell they're doing half of the time.

Q: Sometimes they don't, Eddie Lee. Like flying by the seat of your pants. What about pets? Did you have pets when you were down south? And how did the pets that you had down south compare with the way people treat pets or keep pets in the city?

Kerr: Well, I don't recall any pets in the south. Animals, when I say other than some livestock, that I can remember people in the family having at the time, they were hunting dogs. They weren't what you might call a pet. They were kept for a purpose. And the same thing here in Newark. You see a lot of guys with, back then when I was growing up, you have these beagles and these hound dogs and you'd go hunting with them. They didn't keep a dog just for the sense of keeping a dog. I mean, they kept a cat, they kept them to catch them big ass rats. [Laughter] So it was a trade off. The cat had a purpose. And if he couldn't catch a mouse, you got rid of him.

Q: That's right.

Kerr: So, and now, well, right now today you keep a pet. We call them pets. But is there still a purpose. I keep one. I keep, you know what I call my dog? A burglar alarm.

Q: You got dogs now?

Kerr: I got a dog now. I had to get rid of the other one because she started chasing kids and making them fall. Every time they passed, the dog bit them. However, see, I, the big dogs, no little dogs only. Chihuas and them big old German shepherds and those Dalmatians. I don't have no use for dogs that big. The dog eat more than I eat. So give me a little dog who barks when somebody come around, wake me up, that's what I need. Nothing else.

Q: How did the incidents of crime in Newark compare with that in your southern home? What

about crimes involving juveniles?

Kerr: I can only speak about Newark. And I don't know what happened here in Newark compared to what it was like when I grew up and what it is today. Because when we were kids, we fought it out with our fists. Today everybody's got a gun or some knife and then they'll kill you for nothing. And the courts, they, it looks to me like. I don't know why. I can't explain it to you. Because they don't think logically. Some of the decisions that are coming out of these courts. I mean, in other words, I've had families coming to me when I working the desk, as a desk lieutenant, and the man come in with a big lip. Has his wife and his fourteen year old kid along with me. He said to me, lieutenant. I said, yes, what can I do you for? He said, I want you to lock my son up. I said, for what? Incurability. I said, what do you mean? He said, he punched me in my mouth. I said, wait a minute. Run that by me again. I said, let me tell you something. I says, I refer him to the juvenile court, and do you think that, sir, they're not gonna lock your son up. I said, now had you walked in here and said to me you want me to arrest you for killing your fourteen year old son for punching you back. I said, I'll gladly do it. But, uh uh, I said, he's still walking around and he punched you in your mouth?

Q: And now, Eddie, what were you inferring by that statement?

Kerr: Exactly what I said. Nothing different. Don't try to add to it or take to it. I'd have killed him. [Laughter]

Q: That's where I thought you were coming from. Now, what were your perceptions of blacks helping each other in Newark? Did it compare favorably with blacks helping each other in your southern hone?

Kerr: Well, helping each other, yes. I mean, there was like a kind of give and take. And I don't know if it had to do with the religiosity or what it was. But nobody had any damn thing anyhow. So it couldn't be their generosity. [Laughter] But there was a certain camaraderie. Let's put it that

way.

Q: Okay. What about race relations? How would overall relations with whites in Newark compare to relations with whites in your southern home?

Kerr: What little experience I had with them, on the few trips I made in the south as I became a man, and the ones, the experiences I had in the service in the Second World War. Please repeat the last part of that question again.

Q: How would overall relations with whites in Newark compare to relations with whites in your southern home?

Kerr: Well, there was, the difference is this. Let me begin by saying it this way. I found out as a result of my service experience primarily and a few visits I made over the Mason-Dixon Line in my travels that the northern Caucasian, what the Indians say spoke with forked tongue.

Q: Speak with forked tongue.

Kerr: Yeah. Okay. Now he'd tell you one thing, but he meant something different. And he'd catch you out on a limb and he'd stick a knife in your back. I found the southern white man, he'd tell you like it is. Up to you to accept it or not to accept it. But he'd be ready to fight me if I don't accept it. But he'd walk away from it and don't bother you as long as you don't cross that line. And he meant what he says. Now that's the experience with it. And I can respect that. At least let me know where I stand with you and I know how to take it from that point on. For I don't have no more love for you than you have for me. Let's put it that way.

Q: Catherine, what differences do you remember in white/black relationships in the south as compared to what you found when you came to Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I found down south you say, yes sir and no sir and no mam. Something like that. And I lived there in the depression and they were saying yes and no to anybody. What was, I wondered what person didn't. How come they had to pass all these hick towns or whatever it was. You had to say yes mam, no sir, even to the young, you know, like.

Q: Teenagers.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. Saying yes sir or no mam or something like that.

Q: So when you came here you found that, you had to get used to that.

Mrs. Kerr: I was saying it a longer time. And some of the white people say you don't have to say that. You're not in the south anymore.

Kerr: You know something. This reminds me of something with me. Now I grew up with a yes mam and no mam and yes sir and no sirs. And even today I use it. It doesn't matter what color the person is. This lady on the first floor. I say yes mam or no mam every time we talk.

END SIDE ONE; TAPE TWO, BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

Kerr: To use those when I speak of them. I do it every day. Because it's become. But if they're going to start MFing me and all that, cause you can kid about it. I just walk away from him. And women are just as bad as the men.

Q: Yeah. It's so different out there. It's like midnight and day. What major customs and traditions from the south do you recall surviving in Newark? Like cookouts and barbecues, etc.

Kerr: I don't see it anymore. In fact, I don't know about how the south is doing it, but here, as far as I'm concerned, there's no community. It's more or less non-existent as compared to when I was

growing up.

Q: But when you were growing up, people did get together, have cookouts and?

Kerr: Oh yeah. Family, church and Sunday School, the whole works. Okay?

Mrs. Kerr: Barbecue whole pigs on a holiday.

Q: So now you're afraid to go outside.

Mrs. Kerr: You got that right. You'll have more there than you can feed. And might get run off from your place you're having it.

Kerr: That's right.

Q: Do you think the block parties that we celebrate sometimes in some of our neighborhoods, you think that's an outgrowth of how we used to live in the south?

Kerr: I would say that it's they're trying to get something back that they lost. Let's put it that way. And we lost a lot.

Q: When you first came to Newark, and Cat this would refer to you, this would be relevant to you more so than Eddie, how would you received or treated by African-Americans who had lived in Newark for a long time when you first came here?

Mrs. Kerr: I think very good. Because around my extended family and friends [voice too low to hear].

Kerr: Can I answer that?

Q: Sure.

Kerr: Basically what I believe is that the people that came here initially from the south came up with a vision. Because I look back at some of my father's friends and family, they came here not expecting a handout. The logo for the City of Newark back then was city of opportunity. And believe it when I tell you, all you got to do is that song Frank Sinatra sang about New York, New York, if you can, how's he say, you can make it anywhere.

Q: Yeah. I know what you're saying.

Kerr: Anyway, if you couldn't make it in Newark, you could not make it anywhere. And it wasn't that it had to be so great a job, but there was work you could get. You could always get a job if you wanted to. It might not be what you wanted, and all those kind of things.

Q: Do you know of any part of Newark where black people from a particular part of the south have settled together? If so, give details. For instance, like, you came from a certain town in Georgia. Do you know of a neighborhood in Newark where people from that particular area have settled together and lived together over the years?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, relatives. It was that way with relatives. People from the south, and you know. And they keep in touch. Friends from my home town, I don't run across them here.

Q: Ed, that wouldn't refer to you very much cause you were five years old.

Kerr: They say, it's interesting, the people who originally came here, they had ambition. They wanted to get ahead. They didn't come here to sit down and to look for handouts. They come here to get a job and get a place, a home that's big enough. Because most of my family came here by themselves, like my father. Proceeding their family, then sent for them. And when they got them, they had a job and they was almost ready to buy a house. The same thing when we had

roomers. Remember we had roomers on Belmont Avenue? That first bunch of roomers that we got, about the third bunch, the same situation. They came here, and they didn't come to be no roomer. They came to buy. And they saved their money, and they bought homes. Every one of them bought homes. And when they rolled out, guess what, they hit the bottom of the barrel.

Q: Tell me about it. Tell me about it.

Kerr: And I told my mother, look, let's rent this apartment out. Heck, we don't need no roomers here, nothing but trouble.

Q: Now this section which is getting close to the bottom. We're gonna to just kind of rush through these, but I do, would like to have, you know, some of the answers.

Mrs. Kerr: The nap time.

Q: Yeah. What kind of work did you do in the south before you came to Newark, Kathleen?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, after school I worked, you know, after regular school I had a job at the school. And when that was over, I went and got a job, I worked for the service. What was it called?

Q: Domestic service, yes.

Mrs. Kerr: Domestic service. Taking care of children and cleaning house. And didn't do too much washing and things like that.

Q: What was your first job in Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Lilley, who was it Eddie? Oh, used to be a factory over there. At the Lilley school.

Kerr: What kind of factory? There's factories all over Newark. What kind of factory are you talking about.

Mrs. Kerr: You don't know where it is.

Kerr: Tell me, was it a canning factory?

Mrs. Kerr: No. No. Not the canning factory.

Kerr: On Lilley Street?

Mrs. Kerr: Yes.

Kerr: What did he make?

Mrs. Kerr: I don't know what we made.

Kerr: Were you making lamps? Electric bulbs.

Q: Well, I suppose it would suffice to say that it was a factory job.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. It was a factory job.

Q: Okay. How did you get that job?

Mrs. Kerr: My cousin had told me about it. They were hiring. And I got into the best that I had and went there, stood out in the line with the rest of them. They were picking, you know, who they wanted. But they were hiring, and they got to me about the third one. And I had a job. People making lamps.

Q: Okay. You just answered my next question what did you do there. How long did you work there?

Mrs. Kerr: I think I worked there until they closed down. Was seasonal.

Q: How did you regard that job? Was it something that you were satisfied in doing or did it fulfill any kind of ambition that you had?

Mrs. Kerr: I liked to work, and I liked working there. Plus it filled something. It gave me some money to pay my rent and buy.

Q: Eddie Lee, as far as you remember, what was the very first paid job that you had?

Kerr: Selling papers. Nine years old. And then I used to work for Dick Green on the pepper wagon, hawking fruits and vegetables. At nine years old, he gave me a push cart full of oranges to go and sell them. You know, like a commission merchant. And we took that push cart and we went over to North Newark. The kid, this kid was from North Newark, he was an Italian kid. We made one mistake. That push cart out to [?]. You know where that was? We started down on Seventh Avenue hill, and that push cart dragged us all the way down. I was nine and he was twelve. We couldn't hold it back. And from there, I went to work on a milk truck, delivering milk door to door.

Q: How did you regard those jobs then? Was it important to you beyond the fact that it, you earned money for doing it?

Kerr: No, I didn't say that. Because, you see, my father didn't have no money to give me. If I didn't go earn it myself, I didn't have nothing. My mother didn't have no money to give me. So, in fact, I used to give them part of the money, the few dollars I was working to keep the house going. And I say, when I got a job driving a milk truck, I went, you know, I just kept going up the

ladder. Getting jobs that were better than the last job. And my father, let's see, the last job I had before I started working at the factory, my father worked for National Random Dye Company, and they was on Prince Street in a little storefront. He was making fifteen dollars a week. I got a job driving a garbage truck making twenty-eight dollars a week. I was only seventeen years old. So, I worked a long time. I worked fifty-six years altogether.

Q: Kind of long time, Eddie.

Kerr: Now you see why I won't work no more, don't you?

Q: What were the working conditions like, particularly with you Catherine, working in the factory, what were the working conditions like? How did the supervisors relate to the workers?

Mrs. Kerr: I didn't have any problems. They were very good at that factory over here. They were very good. We had a good relation. I never had any trouble with the supervisors or my, what do you call them, the people that worked. They have so many people that working.

Q: What were the racial make up of the people that you worked with?

Mrs. Kerr: There was more white people. All the supervisors, and all the team leaders, they were all white.

Q: What were their attitudes toward the black workers?

Mrs. Kerr: Well, I don't know. We didn't have any problem. I didn't hear of any problem. They treated me all right. And I, you know, I didn't mess with them.

Q: Eddie Lee, you said you started working with this push cart, what were the conditions of the work? You and this guy sold the oranges, collected the money, and you took it back to this.

Kerr: Back to the commission merchant, and he gave us what we were supposed to have.

Q: Okay. What did you think about that?

Kerr: Nine years old. What could I think about? I was making some money. But with the, I was working on a wagon with the [?], now that was a. That was working by the day. And you started at six o'clock in the morning and you worked to eleven at night, and you got a dollar, seventy-five cents for the whole day.

Q: Could you at that time notice or did you come in contact with any kind of racial conflicts doing that kind of thing?

Kerr: It always depended on what neighborhood you was in. See, now when you're hawking fruits and vegetables like that, or delivering milk, really, I mean, you'd be all over the city. I mean, you didn't have no set place you had to work. So North Newark you don't want to get caught after dark over there, no matter what you were doing if your face was black, see. On the other side of Central Orange, and especially the other side of Orange Street, forget about it, they'd run you out of there see. And over here, on this side of town, the same thing applied for, what do you call it, for Corchran Avenue. See, and once you cross Avon you begin to get into equal territory. You cross Clinton, you could make it pretty good til you crossed Hawthorne. After that, you got run out from over there after dark. And going out west to the [?] has that park, where the Parkway is now, you didn't want dark to catch you up there either. And if the neighbors didn't do it, the police would run you out, so you have no choice. You had to get out of there. But other than that, I mean, there was no problem. As long as you're there in the daytime.

Q: Since you started your work experience, from the earliest up until you retired, were you ever unemployed for any length of time? What about you Cath?

Mrs. Kerr: I've never drawn. After I stopped work, after we were laid off or something, [voice

too low to hear].

Kerr: She was unemployed for twenty-eight years. We got married like last week and she worked one week for Four Star Factory Company, and she didn't go back no more for twenty-eight years. She didn't go back to work no more. But see I tell you something, you talk about was I ever unemployed. I always had me something to fall back on. I used to work two and three jobs at a time. Until I got tired of it.

Mrs. Kerr: He was my provider so I didn't have to. [Laughter]

Q: That was good. That says a lot for him. A lot for him. What was the common occupations for black and women in Newark when you came? Or did blacks enter new occupations during your residence in Newark? What kind of occupations were commonly done by black folk?

Kerr: You talking to me or my wife?

Q: Both of you.

Mrs. Kerr: Now, I'm just trying to think. My brother's girlfriend, she worked at Western Electric.

Kerr: My Aunt Druscilla she worked for Western too.

Mrs. Kerr: Yeah. She did. You know, when I married, I only knew the family. You know, what they. Like Inez was teaching. And Thelma worked at.

Kerr: One of them lamp.

Q: Radiant Lamp. I used to work there. Right, three blocks where you lived at the time.

Mrs. Kerr: And I was so busy having children that I didn't go to work.

Q: Okay. Do you have any kind of mementos, like photographs or anything you have now that pertains to any of the work that you ever did while you were in Newark?

Kerr: I don't know whether Kathleen did with it, find mine in the middle of the floor. No, I'm talking about photographs now.

Mrs. Kerr: Oh photographs. You don't want the.

Q: That's okay. That's an award that you got from the.

Mrs. Kerr: I have many awards.

Q: Your councilman Sharpe James.

Mrs. Kerr: There he is.

Q: Okay. Good. Very good. Eddie Lee, what did you, you found what in the middle of the floor?

Mrs. Kerr: Oh, he didn't find anything.

Kerr: Photos.

Mrs. Kerr: Oh, photos you found. [cross talk]

Kerr: And I don't know where, and I haven't seen them in years.

Mrs. Kerr: What kind of photos are you talking about?

Kerr: I'm talking about photos of our past life. I'm not talking about nothing that happened.

Mrs. Kerr: Well, the box is up.

Kerr: Don't worry about it. I'm not going to try to dig them out now.

Q: Now, I just asked if you had any of those things that you kept over the years. So you do have some mementos.

Kerr: See, that's the day we got married. I blew that up myself. And made. It needs refinishing, you know, like air brushing.

Q: Yeah. How about that?

Kerr: But I took a copy of the picture and blew it up. I didn't have the negative.

Q: Well, you do have some mementos from yesteryear.

Mrs. Kerr: I was looking for my.

Kerr: I wouldn't worry about it Cat.

Mrs. Kerr: But I wanted to show her all those hundreds of certificates that you had. Got a book full.

Kerr: And speaking about awards. Let me see now.

Mrs. Kerr: There they are, right up there.

Q: Oh, yeah. How about that.

Mrs. Kerr: And over on this wall. I don't have any place to hang mine.

Q: Yeah.

Mrs. Kerr: Here's mine right there. But I have a lot of them.

Q: Well, that's good. That says something about the, how you were regarded in the work that you did. Okay, what church do you belong to?

Kerr: If they haven't thrown me out, I still belong to St. John's.

Q: When was the last time that you done to church?

Kerr: I don't remember. [Laughter]

Mrs. Kerr: I'm a member of the Mt. [?] Baptist Church on 434 Central Avenue.

Q: Okay. Do you still attend regularly?

Mrs. Kerr: Yeah. I'm the Sunday School superintendent.

Q: Oh beautiful.

Mrs. Kerr: I'm the treasurer of the church and I'm also a deaconess.

Kerr: She's a deaconess and I'm not a deacon. But she is.

Mrs. Kerr: You do your work and they elect you.

Q: Right. It doesn't mean. Deaconess does not mean that you have to be married to a deacon or should be married to a deacon. How much have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark?

Mrs. Kerr: Oh yes. That's why I wanted those certificates. I joined everything going back.

Kerr: The only thing I belong to now is the American Legion, life member of the VFW in Newark, and I'm a member, but I don't go none of the meetings, DAVs, Disabled American Veterans. And Rutgers University College Alumni Council.

Q: Now Cat, both of you have quite a few awards on the walls and off the walls, etc. Which ones mean most to you? Which award that you ever got meant most to you?

Kerr: Did you see that one up there signed Rutgers State University? The one on the plaque. It took me ten years to get that one.

Q: That's your degree from Rutgers?

Kerr: Yeah.

Q: Okay. Okay. And Kathleen, you got the Distinguished Citizen Award.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. And this is the certificate. I got a lot of them.

Q: Commending you, what was that commending you for?

Mrs. Kerr: For the work I've done.

Kerr: Now see that one there in the bottom, in the middle, now that one I could do without. I almost got killed getting that one.

Q: What is that?

Kerr: Medal of Merit, police department.

Q: Medal of what?

Kerr: Merit.

Q: Merit, okay.

Kerr: Some guy was shooting at me, and I didn't have a chance to shoot at him. And when I did get a chance to shoot him, he had his back to me and I wouldn't shoot him in the back.

Q: That was commendable of you. [Laughter]

Kerr: That one I didn't need. I didn't want that one.

Q: How much have you participated in political activities in Newark? And what political organizations and what political party, Democrat, Republican, how much have you participated in political activities?

Kerr: She's the politician in the family. I introduced her to them when we first got married. And then I came to the conclusion that it wasn't my cup of tea. For many different reasons I'm not going to try to get into it. Cause I don't bother her in her. I let her go her way. And I just try to

stay out of, I try to stay out of the way of the steamroller when it comes rolling down the hill.

Q: What kind of participation did you have, Cat? What were some of the things that you did politically?

Mrs. Kerr: Community activities. You know, voter registration.

Kerr: She worked on that thing as a ward leader, whatever you call it.

Q: District leader.

Kerr: District leader. Yeah.

Mrs. Kerr: Block organization. President and everything from the precinct council.

Kerr: And Sharpe had her doing something. What do you call that job he had you doing down there in his office, City Hall? Community. What was that?

Mrs. Kerr: Community relations.

Kerr: No. There's another name for it.

Q: Liaison. Community liaison. Was it community liaison?

Mrs. Kerr: Just work. That's what I say.

Q: They can come up with some of the most fabulous names.

Kerr: I'm telling you. Well, you see the job that they had her doing down there, I think Mrs. Rice

was in charge of the office. But what's the name of that damn office. I don't remember. It don't make no difference now. Because they did it. And see, let me tell you something. I got to tell you this. I used to do, before I put aluminum siding on this house, I was painting every five years. Okay? So I painted it once, I painted it twice. But every time it came around, the price, each time the price would double. So I said, wait a minute, I ain't going to be able to pay this so let me put some siding on this house. I don't have to paint it no more. So in the meantime, the house next door they had abandoned it. And when I got the price to do the work around here, I got around to doing it, the house was abandoned next door. And what I wanted to do was put.

Q: No. That's okay. Go ahead.

Kerr: And so now, inspector come around told me I had to do it right away. You tell me how to, I'll do it. So he cited me and I had to go to court. So I get to court, and the judge, the judge and I didn't get along, this particular judge. And he don't want, now he's got me where he wants me. And he started. Now he on one side sticking me and this guy on the other side sticking me. And I told all of them I wasn't gonna do nothing until they tore that house down. They wouldn't tore it down, see. So I called now the Board of Health, code enforcement. And I know the people down there and I want to know what's wrong. What are you guys trying to stick it to me for all of a sudden. They said, man, there's a woman over there called Mrs. Kerr. She's a thorn in my side. She's like a gadfly. Do you know her? I said, wait a minute, wait a minute. They told me what's going on. I said, look friend, that's my wife. I said, what you guys are doing you should do without anybody asking. You know. So now it was too late. Doggone it, I got the judge, and I went down there with this block captain, she used to be president of the block group. So what she told me was that she had Beaufort, he was the health department director at the time, had Sharpe James who was a councilman, and a few other people, dignitaries down there. They walked all through the neighborhood. There's about half a dozen families that eyesores. Particularly, have they already got rid of that doggone rooming house. Yeah, the guy torched it. Three of them across the street. He's torched them. It took us fourteen years. It's not zoned for rooming houses. Took us fourteen years to get the guy, and then he torched the doggone houses. I got them three

bombs across the street, and I got this bomb next door here. And the guy told me about fixing my house up. So now. So then who told me that he had threatened you. Downtown big shots nowadays says I'm gonna get you all. I'm gonna write you all up. I said, inspector. I don't know who it was? Who told me that? Was it you that told me that?

Mrs. Kerr: No, it's George I think.

Kerr: Well, anyhow, so I went to see the judge the next time, and I took the whole block group with me. All those little old ladies with white sneakers. Okay? I had them with me when I went before the judge. And they told that judge what this inspector had done, and he was there. He had to be there, see. So the judge says, is that true? He says, yes, your honor. He said, Mr. Kerr, do you have a picture of what you're talking about? I said, no, but I can get you one. So I took a picture of this house and all of the rest of the bombshells. And I had them blown them up to eight by tens. Okay? Now, went down there the next time. I had label, address on the back of all the pictures. And I gave them to him. There's one building down here that was about to fall down. It had a big campaign sign on it to vote for Gibson, he made this happen. [Laughter] So the judge looked at the pictures, and he said to the inspector, which of these houses belong to Mr. Kerr. So he showed it to him. He said, that's the best looking house on the block. [Laughter] He said, what are you trying to do to the man? He told that guy to get them houses out of here. The bombshells. That picture, he didn't give me that one back though. {laughter} But we got it, we got it done. And that's what I had the work done on the doggone house. But see, that's the kind of trouble that she makes. And I don't get annoyed about it because I booted him right back.

Q: Okay. You just about answered the next several questions that I was supposed to ask on here. Aside from being a consumer of regular goods and services, in what ways did you participate in the economic life of the community?

Kerr: Me.

Q: Either one of you.

Kerr: Pay my taxes every quarter when they're due. What else you want from me?

Q: You didn't have any, any services that you provided?

Kerr: Oh yeah, yeah. I provided a lot of services when I was a policeman. Because ninety percent of the time I was on the job, I was not as a working stiff. In fact, thirty-one years on the job, twenty-seven years as a supervisor, administrator. Okay? Only four years as a patrolman. And I instituted a lot of things, and I don't want to get into them. But in fact I understand they're still doing that I started.

Q: Did any of those things pertain to the economic life in Newark?

Kerr: No, the service life.

Q: Services. Okay. More or less social services.

Kerr: I was in a service outfit, police department. Supposed to be service. I don't mean if you get any service or not, you're supposed to.

Mrs Kerr: Now this is.

Q: Go ahead, Cat.

Mrs. Kerr: This about community activities. Is this the question you're asking.

Q: Well, yeah. That was the question before about community activities.

Mrs. Kerr: Well, maybe it isn't.

Q: Yeah. Go ahead on. What is it?

Mrs. Kerr: My job has been to help people, like senior citizens. And I take them. [voice too low to hear] I usually do it. Now I'm working on Wednesdays. [voice too low] And I instruct the kids. [voice too low].

Q: Well that contributes to the economic life of the community because it will help people out, and they will learn to make their own clothing.

Mrs. Kerr: The mayor's wife helps me. She comes when she has time. She helps us.

Kerr: She didn't tell you about she get involved in distributing, share, what do you call it? Not share. That share program. But she's now. I don't know whether it's economic, service or what you want to call it. But for a while, in fact, I'm supposed to get installed as a member of the urban gardening program at Rutgers. And I don't attend the meetings anymore. They don't have the meetings regular anymore anyhow. But then with the college, with my alumni association, they do a lot of things, and I stay involved with them. Now I don't know if it's economic or social. It doesn't really make any difference. Okay? I just do it because I feel like it. Okay? And it gives me something to do. And the same along these veteran groups. I guess that would be social?

Q: Yeah. But when you were doing the Rutgers gardening project, that contributed to the economic.

Kerr: Yeah. Right. But, you see, I mean, I mean I don't even give these things a thought. And when you mention some of them, I don't relate it to being a part of your answer.

Q: Did you ever own or operate your own business? If so, why, what kind of business and what

size was it and location, etc.? You talked earlier about having your own business?

Kerr: Yeah. I had my own business about ten years.

Q: A carpentry business.

Kerr: Yeah. Doing home improvements. And what I was able to do when I was working. Because, as I said, our folks was just beginning to buy properties. This is back in 1950 when I started. And when they bought the property, and inspectors come along and find so many things wrong. But see they don't have no money to do any work on them, see. So it's hard for me to get jobs for them cause I couldn't carry them. And I couldn't get no credit for them either. Cause they was up to their necks in credit. So what I.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE THREE

Kerr: On rainy days, inclement days I would check buildings that needed work done. And I'd go to the Hall of Records and find out who the owners were and I'd give them a call. In fact, I used to park on street corners, my truck, early in the morning. And put my name and my phone number, these people in the community going to work, they would call me. Okay? I had two problems with that. See. The problem number one. I couldn't get no work because of my folks didn't have no, they couldn't afford me. Okay? The black folks. The whites, they either did it themselves or got other white guys to do it. Okay? So now, I had a partner and we did a job. And he said it was gonna rain, he would tell me, look man, he says, don't stay home in the bed waiting for it to rain. Let's go to work and let the rain stop us. And in the meantime, I'm getting on my knees and praying for some help. Okay? So one day at the restaurant, I usually took a coin, you ain't gonna believe this, but I just took a coin at lunchtime to make up my mind whether I could have a bowl of soup or hot dog for my lunch. I was doing construction work see. But this coin this day, I missed it when it came down. And I bent down to pick the coin up and looked at the back wall, and you know what the sign on the back wall said?

Q: No.

Kerr: Get up off your knees and hustle. This is why I started sitting on the corner so people could see my truck and give me phone calls. So, in the meantime, now, I still can't get no work from my people, but I can't afford to carry. So went around to all these different banks trying to get them to give me, they called them discount paper, to lend the people the money so I can do the work for them. So I went to pay a bill to my roofing supplier. And I walked in there, and he walked up to me and he said, my God, Ed, what's the matter? Did you have a death in the family. Because I was dressed with a hamburg on and all this stuff. I said, no, no death in the family. So he said, what you sick about? So I said, you don't want to hear my tale. He said, tell me anyhow. So I told him that I couldn't get no credit for my customers, and I couldn't do the work on me. I couldn't do it. He said, that all? I said, that all, Mr. Kellere, what else do you need? He said, I tell you what you do? Have you been to the Gramidon. I said, Gramidon. That's in Staten Island. I'd been to Manhattan, I couldn't get no bank to take paper for me. He said, they got an office on 1060 Court Street. He said, go down and see my buddy Smit down there, and tell him I sent you. He said, wait a minute. I'll call him. He called down there, and he says, come down right away. I went down there. This guy Smit he asked me a lot of questions. I answered them. So I listened to him two, three days. Three days later I got applications, a whole package of them, to give to you to fill out so you could credit so I could do the work for you. That was the beginning, Mr. Keller. I had a lumber contractor that give me, I'm sorry, lumber yard that give me all the lumber I needed. And Joe Ricardi. Okay? All the paint and equipment I needed, he'd let me have until I could pay him. Now I had these, I had a Jew, and Irishman and a Ginney. [Laughter] That was backing me. Backing me to the hilt. Now how can you hate people?

Q: A ginney was an Italian, right?

Kerr: Yes. How can you hate people? See. Now these guys, now I was able to do work for you at a competitive price. You pay the bank. The bank pays me. Okay. Now I did that for pretty near ten years. That's one reason why I never had, I always had work. I mean, I never had a

problem with getting jobs. I always had a job. It might not have been what I wanted, but it put bread on the table.

Q: Do you have any kind of records or materials, etc., that pertain to the work that you did? You have any records at all?

Kerr: I probably have some cards, and some, what do you call them things, letterheads and stuff like that. But I don't have none of them advertisements any more.

Q: Such records as you have, would you be willing to make photostatic copies so that we can?

Kerr: If I can find any of the papers or the cards, I can give you one of them. I think in my cabinet, my file cabinet.

Mrs. Kerr: Would you like to have something of mine?

Q: Yeah. What I'm suggesting is anything that you have that we could make photostatic copies of. You see, like I said, we're trying to set up a oral display, an oral history of our experiences in Newark. And such documents as you have I'd be more than happy to photostat them and.

Kerr: Well, I'll see what I have. Because the stuff like that is blank anyhow. See, if I can find the stationery it would be blank. And the cards, you know, a business card is a business card. And then you're talking about other stuff, I'm pretty sure that I might have some cards left from when I was police director.

Q: Well, can I ask you to, you know, when you have a moment to see what you can find that relates to those businesses. And you can me and I'll come back and pick it up.

Kerr: Okay.

Mrs. Kerr: We're gonna have to get a letter from that school. I'll get it from you. Dyson.

Q: Is that Henry Dyson?

Mrs. Kerr: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. I know Henry. I remember Henry from the NAACP.

Mrs. Kerr: Yes. Still there.

Q: Yeah. How about that. Well, any kind of records or if you got photographs, old photographs, of people that you were involved with at the time. Anything such as that that we can put together in a display.

Mrs. Kerr: I'm sure we can find certificates here.

Q: Some of them may be relevant Cat. Some of them may be relevant. Because of the name of the organizations that awarded it to you would be on those certificates. And it also indicates the kind of activity that you were involved in. Sure. You know, be selective cause I don't want the whole notebook.

Mrs. Kerr: I know you don't.

Q: Be selective. And anything that I.

Mrs. Kerr: You can go through it and see what you would think.

Q: Well, I'll come back another day and we can sit down and go through those things.

Kerr: I tell you another thing. See the primary thing, like I told you before about Newark, the logo being the city of opportunity. You see, that if all I wanted was opportunity. I never want, I mean, you've heard, say, what is it you people want. My answer is I want, I don't want what you got. I just the want the opportunity to get some of it. That's all. I'll get my own. Now, I got from oil burner service school, Lincoln Tech. I got another from another from a carpentry school where I went there on the GI Bill. Both of them. Oil burner service, carpentry work, and I went to Vo Tech when I first came out of school. In fact, we was married when I was going to Vo Tech. But I had to stop because I couldn't, it was eight hours in the day school, and I couldn't make it. I had to go to night school where I could do six hours and get the same thing accomplished. But, however, see, then I got my associate up there. I made the dean's list one time, and I didn't want to make, so I didn't try to make it no more because it was too hard. Then I got the other one. What do you call that thing? The bachelor's.

Q: A bachelor's degree, baccalaureate degree.

Kerr: Yeah. And that's in political science, and the other one in the police science. They called it police science. We called it by another name back then.

Q: Criminal justice, they call it.

Kerr: Criminal justice they call it now. But, however, see, now that aside from all those little odd jobs I would do for one reason. You know what that was. Keep that wolf away from the door. [Laughter] And we made it. To tell you how I know how we made it was another way we made it, because we would not buy nothing. They wouldn't sell me nothing on credit, and when I got where I didn't need it, I wouldn't buy nothing on credit. Okay?

Q: How did you get information on the news and events of the community? Did you read a black newspaper? If so, what one? Did you listen to a black oriented radio station? If so, which one.

Kerr: Well, I used to sell the Afro-American, the Newark Herald, the Chicago Defender, and the Pittsburgh Courier. And when I no longer sell them, they used to send them to us.

Q: You sold them Eddie, did you read them?

Kerr: Of course I had to read them. I had to tell my customers all about them.

Q: Okay. That was a little bit facetious.

Mrs. Kerr: I listened to the radio.

Q: You listened to the radio, Cat.

Kerr: What's that lady, Mrs. Bass?

Q: Bernice Bass? Loose and Views.

Kerr: What happened to her?

Q: Bernice is still here in Newark on Handsberry Place.

Kerr: She's on Handsberry? Well how come they canceled her program?

Q: I don't know. There was some controversy about that at the time. I don't even remember what it was.

Kerr: Well, at any rate, see I tell you something. I've been, you know, all my life I've been more or less militant. Because when I went down to join the Navy, I came back home. Because the only thing they let a black man into was the mess's branch. And that your job they called it steward.

Your job was making up beds and setting tables for white officers. Okay? And shining their shoes and all that kind of thing. I ain't never shined shoes. I sold papers, but never shined no shoes for nobody. I didn't feel. I don't believe I should get on my knees for no man. Okay? But, however, see, blacks, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, I don't know if Debois had anything to do with it or not, and Eleanor. They got that crap straightened out. But it's all lip service. Take my word for it.

Q: When you say Eleanor, you mean Eleanor Roosevelt?

Kerr: Yeah.

Q: Why do you say it was all lip service?

Kerr: When Roosevelt, the president, when he signed that order that he had to open the Navy to all branches for the black man. That was just to get you in. See once you got there, you were just as segregated as you was before you left home. And they rubbed it in too.

Q: Do you know what was the relationship between black Newark and other black communities in New Jersey? Or did you visit other black communities in the state?

Kerr: The relationship?

Q: Yeah. Between black Newark and other black communities in New Jersey.

Kerr: Well, we were all subjected to the same indignities. Let's put it that way. Now, but see the difference was this. Back in the years I'm talking about, my high school and grade school days, there was two communities in Newark. I mean, in essence, let's put it that way. The blacks felt that were four hundred. East Orange and Montclair. Okay? And we were, in other words, they were the badges and we were the proletariat down here in Newark. Now that's the relation I found

out with the blacks. They're their own worse enemies. Stick their nose up at you.

Q: What outstanding blacks did you meet or here in Newark?

Kerr: Here?

Q: In other words, did you meet any outstanding blacks beside those bourgeois you're talking about?

Kerr: Well, the guys down here, those politicians, which you can't believe half of what they say. But, however, you take like, what's his name? The one who Belmont Avenue's named after now.

Q: Irving Turner?

Kerr: Irving Turner. The first time that he ran for, he ran for, what's the name? It wasn't councilman, it was another job. Commissioner. They had five commissioners running Newark see. So he ran for commissioner of the Third Ward. I think I got seven hundred fifty petitions signed for him the first time. I know he used to be editor of the Newark Herald. You know that don't you?

Q: Newark Herald.

Kerr: Yeah. He was the editor of the Newark Herald. He had his office down on Kenny Street and the corner of Prince Street.

Q: I didn't know that.

Kerr: But at any rate, and the second time around I got petitions signed for him. I was driving a cab and getting petitions signed the whole time I was driving. We used to go and pick up people and

take them to the polls and bring them back home again. Her friend Fannie Brown got me involved in that. But you see now, Honey Ward. You heard about him?

Q: Yeah.

Kerr: Okay. I met him and I met, what's that lady's name. Stark, Larry.

Q: Larry Starks.

Kerr: And her brother, Calvin.

Q: Yeah. Calvin West.

Kerr: Yeah. I met all them during that time. I met Herb Tate, Sr., and Earl Harris. They used to belong to the Third Ward Republican Club used to be down on the corner of Rose and Somerset Street back in those days.

Q: Did you think of these people as being outstanding blacks in the community?

Kerr: They were forward thinking blacks. Especially the Tates and that Earl Harris and some folks out for what they can get. But you see these guys meant business. I've known Earl since I first came out of service. He's dead now, of course. So's Herb Tate, Sr. He was a judge when he died. You remember him?

Q: Who judge?

Kerr: Tate.

Q: I didn't know him personally, but I did hear of him.

Kerr: Well, his son was the prosecutor in Newark. And Essex County prosecutor for a long time. Under Kean I think it was. The Governor Kean appointed him. And because he's Republican. And so now Whitman's got him down in Trenton doing something. I don't know what else they got him doing. That's where he is right now.

Q: Cath, you had something that you wanted to add?

Kerr: And there was another judge, what's the name. What's that judge's name that you?

Q: Yancey.

Kerr: Yancey. Yeah. And then what's his name, under Adenizio, this crippled guy in church.

Q: Hazelwood.

Kerr: Hazelwood. Yeah. And see if we can just work on this house, me and Jessie work on this house, down his mother's house right down on Miller Street. See all those folks, I mean, they're friends of mine. Let's put it that way. [Laughter]

Q: Okay. When you or others in your neighborhood got in trouble or needed help to solve a problem, to whom in Newark did you turn? Why and how effective were they in helping you or others?

Kerr: I didn't bother the politicians too much. That was Kathleen's job. But see, now, not Yancey because I didn't know him that well. But Tate, Earl, and what's that other guy's name that I mentioned before?

Q: Turner.

Kerr: No, Turner he came in too late on the scene. No there was a difference in the time frame. See when Turner was councilman, I think. Yeah, I was a policeman when Turner became councilman. Because that was the new form of government. He'd have never got elected under the commission form. Never. See. But, however, see these guys I could talk to them. Even Honey Ward I could talk to. Calvin West I could talk to. And try to get something done. They're the only politicians. But see when it came to people in trouble with the law, I could talk to Hazelwood. I called him at home. I still got his phone number. And I'd tell him, boss, this is the case. These people will be coming before you. And he'd tell me how to deal with it on our level, on the police level, so it would be easy for him to take care of. Cause it was an injustice them being there. It wasn't that we were trying to beat the law. We was trying to equalize it.

Q: Okay. Where do you remember black people living in Newark? And how was the black Newark perceived? Was the community seen as a slum? In other words, were black people concentrated in one particular area and was it considered a slum, even at that time?

Kerr: Let's put it this way. It was a ghetto. And what had been there before, the people that lived there prior to the blacks, had moved out, but they still owned the property. And that's what it was. It was a ghetto when we got there, and it was a ghetto when we left. And it still is a ghetto. Let's put it that way. Newark is a ghetto. Okay?

Q: Did all classes of African-Americans live close to you?

Kerr: Say that last part again.

Q: Did all classes of African-Americans live close to you? In other words, those bourgeois people, the middle class folk, and the lower echelon if you will.

Kerr: As strange as it may seem, those Prudential apartments down there on Barclay Street, that was supposed to be elite. Back then, back right after the Second World War. So a whole lot of

black folks lived there. That's where Yancey lived in those projects. And then they had the, what do you call them, not the bridge club, the other one, the owl club.

Q: The owl club.

Kerr: That used to be, used to have a three family building down there on, what's that street one block above High Street, coming this way? And where that church on the corner of Waverly, that big church I always used to go down there. What's the name of that church, the name of that street? Anyhow, see, this was, those particular, call them nightclubs for want of a better name. There had been a certain crowd there that I wouldn't say was from that four hundred set, but there's in betwixt and between. Anybody can go in there. Nobody went in there raising hell. Let's put it that way. But it was a community. Let's put it that way. That's the best way I can describe it. It was a community. Everybody knew everybody, and we was all in the same boat together really.

Q: So how did they all get along together?

Kerr: Oh yeah, got along pretty well. It wasn't that much, how would you say, disunity or whatever you want to call it. Because we was all working toward the same thing. You take like some of the restaurants, like Child's and some of the other restaurants in downtown Newark, you couldn't go in them. No matter what your color was and who you were. I mean, no matter what your call in life was in Newark, if you was black you couldn't go in those damn places. Unless you went in with a white man.

Q: Other than white store owners and other whites with a vested economic interest, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community?

Kerr: Besides the ones I named who backed me in my business? Besides them three guys?

Q: Yeah. Just general, whites in general. Like business owners and legal people, politicians, those kind of folk. Did they show any particular interest in the black community?

Kerr: In a sense some did, and in a sense some didn't. But I believe they had an economic interest on their own. They didn't do it just out of the dialogue, as the old folks would say. That's my belief. They had to see something, the way I look at it, they had to see some kind of advantage for themselves. I could be wrong.

Q: Did you shop downtown? If so, at what stores?

Mrs. Kerr: Bamberger's.

Kerr: Well, I shopped, I mean, mostly men's stores. For my goods. And then they had like these, well they call them discount stores today. But I don't know what they called them then. They had a different name for them back then, see. Remember that shoe store you used to take and buy the kids. You know, Lincoln Shoes down on Springfield Avenue, I think the name of it. And then a friend of mine, his family owned Flacks Juvenile Furniture, Ruben. So, I mean, at that time was all neighborhoods. And once you grew up in a neighborhood. Now you take, for instance, butchers that my mother used to go to. Okay? He had a store on Prince Street. What was that butcher's name?

Mrs. Kerr: Paul.

Kerr: Paul. Yeah. And then he bought another one down further on Kenney Street there. Now he lived in the Wickwake section. My English teacher lived on Clinton Place, my eighth grade English teacher, before I went into service. Now, she moved on to Pomona Avenue later on. Paul lived on Ritter all along. People I had did business with and I knew from the Jewish merchants, lived on the Wickwake section. In fact, it's totally Hebrew at the time. Now, when I got the job on the police department, they assigned me to this precinct. And my post was over there. And I

got, and I didn't know they lived there. But now they invite me in like I was old family. And no matter what the situation was, like during the Jewish holidays, hey, I was a Jew.

Q: This was after you became a policeman?

Kerr: No. No. It was before too, but I just was never over that way before I was a policeman. And the president of Canadian Furs, he lived on the same street Sharpe lives on now. See, and they had judges, county judges and federal judges living over that area where Sharpe lives now. And I got to meet a lot of them guys down there see. And there was a councilman, Waldor I think his name was.

Q: Jack Waldor.

Kerr: Yeah. He lived on the corner of, that street that Sharpe lives on, and Elizabeth Avenue. And they made a special post right there because somebody shot at him one night when he was coming home. And they made a special post out of his block. Wilbur Avenue, one block. I used to draw that damn post all the time. Called the councilman post. Got to keep me out of trouble.

Q: What incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark have you experienced?

Kerr: What incidents?

Q: What racial incidents? Involving racial. What incidents involving racial discrimination?

Kerr: Besides what I mentioned to you before?

Q: In Newark.

Kerr: About the discrimination in stores and the public places.

Q: Well, I guess that's the answer to this question.

Kerr: Well, anyhow, you couldn't go in no bowling alleys to bowl, but could set pins. And a lot of them restaurants like Child's and a few others down there, Waldorf and a few others. I can't think of all of them now. Because all of them they don't exist anymore really. But you couldn't go into them and sit down and eat no matter who you were as long as you were black. And the movies, they had you segregated in all the movies. But it was just the way of life so to speak.

Q: Now I'm going to be very selective in my questions from here on because we don't want to go beyond this tape for certain. What do you remember? Now this is something I'm totally unfamiliar with. What do you remember about the quote Mayor of Springfield Avenue, unquote? Does that ring any bells? The Mayor of Springfield Avenue.

Kerr: Are you talking about a police officer?

Q: I don't even know what that is. That's somebody who was referred to as.

Kerr: Oh you know who they're talking about. What's that guy's name who ran that party for me?

Mrs. Kerr: Hanson.

Kerr: No. No. What's his name. He used to have a music store on Springfield Avenue. What's that guy's name? He ran a party for me. Oh shit. When I made lieutenant. Down the Terrace Room. And I can't. Both his names sound like a first or both sound like a last name.

Q: I don't have the slightest idea. That's why I ask the question.

Kerr: No it wasn't Centron. Hold it now.

Q: Let's go back and start this all over again. What do you remember about the Mayor of

Springfield Avenue? Tell me who he was and what you remember about him?

Kerr: Jenkins Holman was the guy's name. And he owned a music store and he was a promoter. You know what a promoter is don't you?

Q: Yeah.

Kerr: Yeah. That he used to promote affairs. In fact, I think he used to promote Jenkins Holman more than he did the affairs. [Laughter] Okay? He was a fixture, though, in the city.

Q: He was a fixture in the city?

Kerr: Yeah, everybody knew him.

Q: What do you remember regarding such local personalities as William Ashby, an early black social worker; Meyer Ellingstein, Newark's first Jewish mayor.

Kerr: I didn't know he was the first Jewish mayor. I know he was a Jewish mayor.

Q: And Prosper Brewer.

Kerr: Yeah, Prosper Brewer. Now, he's one of the big shots in the black community in the Third Ward.

Q: And they refer to him as early black trade unionist.

Kerr: Yeah. Right. Well, trade unionist and he owned a lot of property down there too.

Q: Irving Turner, Newark's first black elected official. We just talked about him. So you

remember all of these other people?

Kerr: Yeah. These are my contemporaries.

Q: What particularly do you remember about each of them? What part did they play or what did they contribute to the black community? Like William Ashby.

Kerr: I think William was a, you say he was a social worker, but I thought he was a teacher. I'm not sure now. I mean, it's been a lot of years now. The name, I mean, I know of him, but I can't really place what he was doing. I thought he was an educator.

Q: I did too. I remember him. I thought I remember him as connected with the schools. Yeah, black social worker, maybe that was connected with education. What about Mayor Meyer Ellingstein, Newark's first Jewish mayor.

Kerr: Well, they say he bought and sold Newark Airport three or four times. I don't know how many times he bought and sold it. [Laughter]

Q: Who was Prosper Brewer?

Kerr: Prosper Brewer, well, he was involved in the unions. I think with the long shoremen. I'm not certain. But it might have been, one of them unions, whichever one. I don't really know which one. However, he was a property owner, a major property owner in the Third Ward. And a politician besides. Which, whatever it's worth.

Q: Now we mentioned Irving Turner before, but what part do you particularly remember that Irving Turner played, and what kind of councilman was he?

Kerr: Well, Irv, let's see now, as I say, the first time he ran I think was around in 47, something

like that. He ran for that commission. And he was plugging that paper before I went into service, that Newark Herald. He was plugging that. I don't know how, but he was not along with us, he was older than we were. And when I say we, I'm talking about my particular crowd. Okay? So, but, however, see, other than just knowing him when I seen him and he being a fixture in the community and a publisher on top of it and run for public office, I mean there's a lot of things that. I don't want to say anything about him because I don't know anything really bad about him. See. But the thing is I know what he was involved in a few times. Like when he was running for those elective offices under the old commission form of government, a lot of collusion going on. And he wasn't above being a party to the collusion. You know what I'm telling. Cause I was a street person. So I knew these things, but a lot of folks didn't know them. As I say, I don't want to, God bless the dead. See I don't want to talk about the dead in a bad way. And he was a necessary evil if that's what you want to call him. He was a necessary evil. See.

Q: Okay, now I'm going to suggest that you give me as short and succinct answer as you can because I've looked at these questions and all of them are important, I mean, as far as our experiences in Newark goes. So let's try to get through these as expeditiously as possible. Okay, what do you remember regarding black institutions like hospitals, hotels and banks?

Kerr: I don't remember any black banks. But, let's see, we had. No. Remember she says. City National is still current.

Mrs. Kerr: Oh. Okay.

Kerr: She's talking about in the past. Now the Coleman brothers they had a hotel down there on Court Street just above Washington Street. And, what's the name of the other place, the Bridge Club. I believe and one right next to it too. And then there's a place across the street. I can't think of the name of it on Washington Street. And what else, now, banks? I don't recall any banks back in that time.

Q: Until First National came in.

Kerr: Not First National.

Q: City National.

Kerr: City National. And let me see now, what's the other institution you're talking about?

Q: Hospitals, hotels.

Kerr: Oh hospitals. We were just talking about that last night weren't we? There was a Doctor's Hospital on Avon Avenue, on the corner of Hillside. That was black. Dr. Darden had a hospital down on the corner of West Kenney and High Street. And that was black owned or black run. There was another one. I can't think of where it was and who ran it. But you see the problem was this. City Hospital was the only damn, excuse me, as a rule was the about the best a black person could do as far as hospital. The other hospitals were private. And you couldn't afford it.

Q: How important were these institutions to the black community?

Kerr: I really can't say because I never needed them.

Q: Kathleen, you were going to say something?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

END SIDE ONE; TAPE THREE, BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE THREE

Q: What individuals do you remember being associated with such institutions?

Kerr: Well, I remember Dr. Darden and Dr. Bacote. And what was that doctor's name, Kathleen, that had that doctor's hospital there on Avon and Hillside? Do you remember his name? That ran it. I can't help you there. I can't remember his name.

Q: Okay. What do you recall regarding the kinds of music?

Kerr: What about the lady doctor? Was she?

Mrs. Kerr: McCall?

Kerr: McCall. Wasn't she connected with some of the hospitals. I'm not sure. The black hospitals. Anyway, go ahead. What's your next question?

Q: What do you recall regarding the kinds of music that one heard in black Newark?

Kerr: There used to be a club called the Kenney Club. Used to be right behind Bell Telephone down there on Williams and Arlington. The Count, the Duke, and what's that guy's name, the singer. Nat Coleman.

Q: Nat King Cole.

Kerr: Yeah. Nat King Cole. Billy Epstein. All them guys between shows over in Harlem and downtown New York, they'd come and do a show at the Kenney Club. And also the Picadilly. Up on Waverly Avenue. And there was another one that used to be over on the corner, right at that bend on West Market Street. I can't think of the name of it now. What's the name of that club that had live music and entertain jazz all the time? And then there was another, on the corner of West Street and West Kenney Street, there was two of them. There was a Horseshoe Club and there was another one there. I can't think of the name of it, but you'd get live entertainment all the time with these top ranking performers. And the theater was called the Shubert back then, see.

And they used to give concerts down there. The same people I'm talking about, plus God only knows who else in the black community that played black jazz. Okay? And they later called it the Adams Theater. That's what they called it afterwards. But, however, see all these places. See Newark was like little New York. You could get anything in Newark that you'd get in New York at any time of day or night. You didn't have to go over there. Take my word for it.

Q: In what leisure time activities did you participate? Like playing sports, or gardening or going to the movies, or those kinds of things. When you were much younger. I know you do a lot of gardening now.

Kerr: I didn't have the time. That's why I'm doing it now. I was working all the time.

Mrs. Kerr: Mine was sewing.

Q: Quilting, basket weaving, gardening, movies, playing sports. But you did, you did. What kind of sewing and for whom did you sew Cat?

Mrs. Kerr: Oh for [voice too low to hear]

Q: What can you tell us about the Newark Eagles? Did you attend any of their games? Were there other black athletic sports events you attended, and what materials, cards, pennants, scorecards, etc., do you have that pertain to such events?

Kerr: I don't have anything from the Eagles. I'm very much aware of them. And the Y, the black Y on Court Street.

Q: At what, the black Y?

Kerr: Yeah. Cause you couldn't go to the Y downtown. The Jews had their own Y on the corner

of Kenney and High Street. And you couldn't go to their Y either. So we had our own Y up there at Court Street, around 165, in that area somewhere. And after the War, when they opened up the doors, when you could come in there. But we had a, George Branch was a member of the Dukers AC and he was a boxer. A lot of guys, I mean, guys participated in sports a lot. And I'm trying to think of some other guys who boxed out of Newark during back in those days. I can't think of the names off the top of my head.

Q: George Branch used to be a little boxer.

Kerr: He was a Dukers.

Q: What do you recall regarding the seamy side of black Newark life? What places, locations were involved? Do you recall any black gangsters and what activities did they engage? What if any positive contributions did they make to the life of the community, and how were they perceived by the community?

Kerr: Well, I don't think they had that much to say because the mob ran everything. See, and I'm pretty sure they were part of the organization. But not at the top. My perception anyway. You know where I'm coming from. I could be wrong because they didn't go around broadcasting if they did. The Italians didn't give a damn whether they negroes or Jews.

Q: What do you recall regarding public education in Newark? How well academically did black students seem to perform? How were they treated by white teachers and students? Were black students involved in intramural sports and/or extracurricular activities? And what black teachers do you recall?

Kerr: I don't remember any black teachers at all. Number One. Schools were totally integrated. Totally. And you had to go. There was no ifs, ands or buts about it. You had to go til you're sixteen. And then you could drop out. But if you dropped out before, the truant officer would

get you. There was no such thing as dropping out. If you didn't go to school, the parents would go to jail. Okay? Newark, during the time I was going to public schools in Newark, was in the top ten nationwide. Okay? Montclair was number one. Figure out the rest for yourself.

Q: Well, now, how well did black students perform academically?

Kerr: They performed, everybody had to meet the same standards. Let's put it that way. There was not no double standards as far as education was concerned when I went through the schools in Newark.

Q: How were they treated by white teachers?

Kerr: I was treated, as far as I can say, we were treated, there was no difference. Until I got to junior high school and got to high school, and then there was a difference.

Q: Were black students involved in intramural sports?

Kerr: Yup.

Q: What about extracurricular activities? What kind of things did you do aside from academics and?

Kerr: We had clubs within the school itself. They had, and they also had like shops after school. The playground opened until nine o'clock at night. They had, not machine shop, but carpenter shops, electrical shops. They had printing clubs. They had all kinds of hobby clubs that you could belong to. Photo. That's where I learned to do photos. In junior high school. And printing too. You know that guy, Otis, what's his name, Otis Voterite. He, we went to school together, and he's still printing. He's in the business. Okay.

Well, immigration, that's the first I got on this list. Here in recent years, there's been a lot

of immigration as far as people from the islands. And it's been good and been bad for the attitude of those folks as opposed to the attitude of the endemic people here. Which is not conducive to peace. Okay? But I will say this much as about the immigrants, is that they come here with a vision too. They didn't come to steal. They came to work and make things better. Which I agree with.

Strikes. I can't remember off the top of my head anything about the strikes that sticks in my mind. Elections. We've had a lot of heated elections here. It's going all the way back to the times of Ellingstein and all the way up to Sharpe. A lot of heat in some of these elections and good and bad came out of both. So I mean it's one of those things. You can't really make a judgment until historically the whole thing's over. Then you can look back with a historical perspective. That's my feeling about it anyhow.

Now fires, we've had. Newark has had a lot of fires. And I can't think of one worse than any of the rest of them. Because each time when they had these big fires they took a lot of property with them. But except for the ones during the riot, which I believe was all arson and was uncalled for. That is my personal belief. But I've worked midnights, I've worked twelve hours a night during the riots for ten days. And you see these fires. We used to look for them. They never start until after midnight. Looking out the Third Precinct, and that was our job trying to catch these fires before they got out of hand. Cause every time, because there's always one that we called a rampart, one of them big apartment houses that somebody torch in the back or in the hallways, and we had to go in and try to get them people out before they got incinerated. And every door we kicked in to bring people out, the first person was somebody begging, knew he was going to lose some of the sooner or later which we did. And I'm still paranoid about that. Okay?

Now, natural disaster. I don't recall any natural disaster in Newark. Cause we haven't had any bad hurricanes or that kind of stuff. We haven't had what I would call natural disaster. You tell me what it is.

Q: No. I don't think we have.

Kerr: Now, I just mentioned the riots and the fires in the same breath. And that's my personal

involvement was in that. And I don't want to get too deep in that because as I say I'm still paranoid about that doggone riot.

Q: Well, I want to ask you one specific question about the riot because we heard so much and so many different versions as to why the riot got started. What do you think was the cause of the riot?

Kerr: You're sure you want my opinion?

Q: Yeah.

Kerr: Well, I think the CIA and the federal government had a lot to do with it. Okay. Because I was working as a street boss, a sergeant at the time. I was working out of the Third Precinct. I saw some people that I had never seen before, rabble rousers. Now the part I saw a lot of these folks, was that my job was to be the sergeant of arms at the council meetings, every time they had a meeting. Okay? And I go down there, and I couldn't believe what was going on. There'd been people I'd never seen before. I don't know who they were. They're like rabble rousers. I mean the worse city in Newark. You go out in the street, you'll find them. Okay. Rabble rousers. They disappeared the night the riots started. I haven't seen any of them since then. Okay? But I will never, as long as I live will believe otherwise, that the government wanted to find out something. They had a lot of technology over in Nam at the time, and they wanted to know how it would work against civil uprisings. Okay. Now, specifically in Newark, one of the major causes of the riots was the people over here in this sector over here, the Wickwake section, they had just built all them houses along Flagan Place. People had just bought them. They had bought a lot of that property along that section where 78 is coming, came through. Number one. Number two. Where the City University, University Hospital, whatever you want to call it, where it is now, historically black folks owned their own properties over there. Now they're gonna make a farm out of that too for the university there. Rutgers University come in here. The same thing. Took. At the last count was twenty-five million dollars ratables they got tax free. Not tax exempt see. It

incited the riots. And no matter how much they try to tell the city fathers about this in private, they run rough shod over them. Somebody told Adenizio when the riot was going to start. And they told me what Adenizio said. You know what he said? I got fifteen hundred men between me and all them rioters. Let them go ahead and riot. You know what my answer was? I'm one of them fifteen hundred. All right.

Q: Now I have one more question I'm going to ask and then I have some short questions I want to ask you about Louise Scott and the Krueger-Scott Mansion if you remember anything about that? This one, in what major ways has Newark changed since you first arrived here, and how do you view the changes that have occurred?

Kerr: The major ways. Education is number one. Down from S to S.

Q: I know what that means.

Kerr: That's the first and worst. The kids are not being educated number one. Number two. The cost is prohibitive for what you're getting for it, education dollars. Okay? Number three. There's no, what do you call it, no ownership anymore. See, people didn't have nothing to begin with. They got even less now. Okay? What else did you want to know about that.

Q: Well, that was it. As far as the changes in Newark. Was there any other changes besides the educational changes that you mentioned? Can you see any other changes that have taken place?

Kerr: Well, the economic. Newark used to be. You could find a good job. Now go out of town to find a job. The economic structure is non-existent so to speak as far as the natives of Newark. The people, these people who work here are mercenaries. Okay? And they take the tax dollars and run with it. So where's the money? So how you gonna maintain a city the way Newark used to be and the way it was used to being with no money.

Q: Right. Now the Scott-Krueger Mansion. What do you recall regarding Louise Scott? Did you know her? Did you ever meet her? What was the community's perception of her? Did you ever visit her home on High Street?

Kerr: I'll take the last question. I never visited the mansion there really. I passed by, but I've never been inside. And I just explained to you earlier, I don't know if we had it on tape or not, when she first started her business down on Barclay Street across from a friend of mine's home.

Mrs. Kerr: What business?

Kerr: Her school of beauty on Barclay Street.

Q: That was before we put the tape on when you and I were talking about that.

Kerr: Yes. Well, anyhow, that's where it started at. And I think I used to ride her in the cab for something. She used to ride my cab for something. I don't what it was. Taking care of some business. And I'd take her back home. But as far as, as how you say, personal friends. No, it was a business venture. I don't know her personally.

Q: You didn't know her personally Cat?

Mrs. Kerr: No.

Q: What do you know about the High Street area in which the Krueger Mansion is found? Did you or anyone you know work for any of the families in the High Street area?

Kerr: Well, that area down there really, I mean, there's a lot of black owned properties down there. Especially on Court Street below Washington. Cause the Coleman Hotel was down there further too, see. And Dr. Shelton, the dentist, he's been there as long as I can remember. Down near the

corner of Mercer Street and High Street, in that area there. Then what's his name, Booth, the funeral parlor there. And those houses, all that bunch of houses along there, I don't know when the immigration of black ownership came in and when it left. Because right around the corner from there across the street, out on Court Street, what's his name, Tate, had his office there. Herb Tate, Sr., that's where his law office was. But see, and even on that other little short street, I can't recall now, where the Owl Club was. What's the next block up from High Street? Begin with N.

Q: Is it Nevada?

Kerr: No, no, no. Nevada is down below Washington Street. Quitman Street. That's it Quitman Street. So you see. No, it ain't no N. But it's not too far from the /Ns. But, however, see, that whole area there, it was just like the section up there by the hospital. Black folks have their own homes in there. And I don't know how many years it's been, but as far back as I can remember, it's been like a quiet, nice boulevard. I guess that's why they call it the boulevard. A place for people to live. And people lived and it wasn't that bad until they put that big old apartment house there. And then when they started putting them apartment houses there, it went down.

Q: Now I'm going to combine these last two questions. How would you sum up your experience of living in Newark, and if you had your life to live over, would you live in Newark? Your reasons for your answer.

Kerr: Well, as bad as it is, I ain't leaving. Okay?

Mrs. Kerr: I like the City of Newark.

Kerr: I would tell you like it is. This is my home, and I ain't leaving. Nobody gonna run me out either. Okay? That answer your question?

Q: Yes. That does. Well, it says if you had your life to live over would you live it in Newark?

And your reasons why you would live in Newark.

Kerr: Well, for the reasons I named before. I doubt very much that it's gonna come back to where it was. It's too far gone. But there's always hope. And when I'm out of the state or out of the city, I can't, I mean, no matter where I am, how far away and how long I'm gone, after ten days or two weeks, I'm ready to come back to Newark. I don't want to stay no more. She's trying to get me to go back to Georgia. I said, I don't know nothing about no Georgia. I don't want to go back to Georgia. This is, Newark is my home. And I mean that.

Q: Kathleen, do you have anything you want to add?

Mrs. Kerr: No. It's just that I would like to go back to Georgia really. I love Newark, but when, if I live to get older, I would like to be in the country, in Georgia.

Q: Well, I want to say thank you very much. And I cannot tell you how much this has meant to me to be able to sit down here and talk with you guys. I guess maybe it meant so much to me because we've known each other for so long. And I thoroughly enjoyed this, and I cannot thank you enough for letting me do this.

Kerr: Well, I tell you something. Off the cuff. You can turn that off if you're finished with it.

END OF INTERVIEW